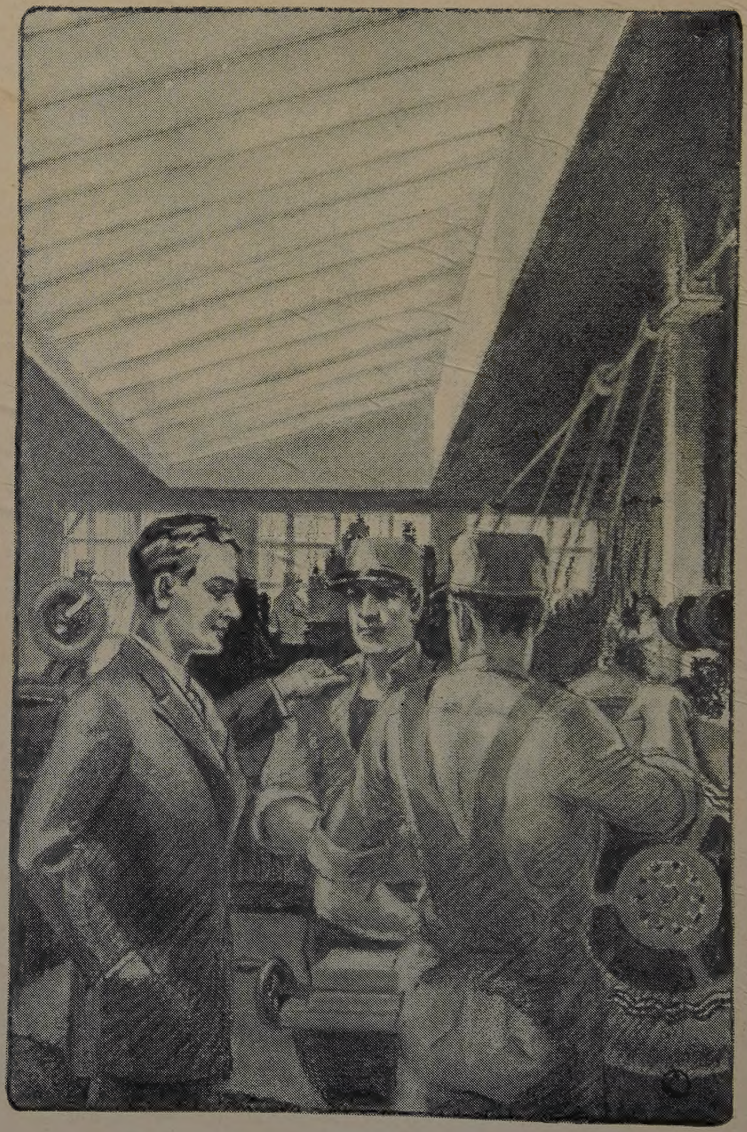
STEVE HOLWORTH OF THE OLDHAM WORKS

HUGH McALISTER



"Don't let your fellows get excited," he said. "Keep their heads level."

STEVE HOLWORTH OF THE OLDHAM WORKS

The Story of a Boy Who Chose a Career in the Rubber Industry

by

HUGH MCALISTER

Author of

"A VIKING OF THE SKY," "FLAMING RIVER"
"THE FLIGHT OF THE SILVER SHIP"
"CONQUEROR OF THE HIGHROAD"
"STAND BY"

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Steve Holworth of the Oldham Works

CHAPTER I

PLUM'S PASTURES

An old trail led through a gap in the rotting fence, half buried by brush and weeds, giving entrance to the rough, unfrequented region known to the town of Glencoburn as Plum's Pastures. Toppling posts proclaimed that at one time bars had closed the way, but no sign of them remained.

Continuing on from the dirt road winding over the hills, the trail followed the crest of a wind-swept ridge, then descended into the deep, narrow valley of Plum Creek. The stream itself was like all the region, rough and in a way forbidding, yet in its air of mystery and wild beauty strangely attractive. Certainly in the view of Glencoburn boys the attractions far outweighed all forbidding aspects, and the more venturesome found in Plum's Pastures and Plum Creek a favored playground. The hike of two miles from

town brought rich reward in fishing, swimming, dam building and the like.

There was romance, too, in the legends of these hills and valleys. One of these, which had something to do with the adventures and undertakings of Steve Holworth, whose story this principally is, was the tale of how Plum's Pastures came to be so designated. For, much as the name might suggest scenes of sleek cattle and contented flocks grazing in pleasant fields and woodlands, the truth was otherwise. At rare intervals one might hear a lone cowbell among the silent hills, for certain of the quarrymen living beyond the lower part of town allowed their solitary old brindles to stray where they might; but in these latter days no other domestic animals ever grazed the broken uplands or the silent valley.

Well established tradition had it that at some very early time one Philander Plum had operated an illicit distillery in certain of the several caverns to be found among the rocky slopes and ledges. To cover his unlawful operations, he made pretense of keeping great herds of sheep, and so laid claim to all the grazing rights up and down the broken region of Plum Creek.

In a manner unknown, Philander Plum

strangely disappeared. Some supposed that he had fallen into Hell Yawns, a seemingly bottomless, natural pit between two great ledges of rock far, far down in which was an unsounded depth of water. Others believed Philander to have been drowned in the creek—a truly dangerous stream at flood time. But whatever his end, certain fanciful people of Glencoburn were wont to declare that at twilight of misty days one might yet hear the departed Philander Plum calling his flocks. And if, standing upon a certain eminence known as Balance Rock, one were to call out across the valley above Plum Creek, the ghost of the long-gone moonshiner would answer back. Sometimes this response was only as a mocking echo; yet again, when conditions were just right, the voice came back not as an echo at all but in tones of harsh urging: "The two-gallon jug! Find the two-gallon jug! Break it open!" Or another time: "Get the two-gallon jug—the one with no handle! Burst it open! Burst it open!"

Tradition also offered an explanation of this curious report, namely, that Philander Plum had hoarded his money all in gold coin and that the two-gallon jug with no handle was nothing less than his banking place. Though many were said to have tried, no

person had ever found the legendary piece of damaged stoneware. However much the phantom voice of Philander urged that the jug be found and looked into, the long-gone moonshiner gave never a clue to the hiding-place of that legendary treasure.

Both Steve Holworth and Bob Liscomb had tried at different times to arouse the voice which tradition said called out across the valley. They had entire success in obtaining a responsive echo of their own shouted inquiries, but that was all. To the high-pitched notes of their shrill young voices, "Oh, Phila-a-ander Plum, where is the two-gallon jug?" they heard only the answering question, "Where is the two-gallon jug?" Or as again they tried, with much diplomacy, "Mr. Plum, we'll bust the jug for you! Holler back where it is!" there came only, and greatly to their chagrin, "Back where it is!"

After two or three such attempts Bob Liscomb was moved to declare skeptically, "I guess there's nothin' to it. Maybe there never was a jug, handle or no handle. I'd just about bet ye it's all bunk."

"Huh! 'Tain't any more foolish to say that there was a jug than that there wasn't," Steve sniffed, sturdily. "Because we don't either of us know. So where's the harm in

trying? Besides, you've got to have things just right; an' maybe this ain't a good day."

At yet another time, something of faith and tenacity in Steve Holworth's blithe young spirit was in a like manner made manifest. For it came about that Uncle Billy Fee, gardener and man-of-all-work for Charles Aldervale, one of Glencoburn's wealthy men and a near neighbor of the Holworths, told the boys that, being at Plum Creek, he had plainly heard the voice of Philander Plum calling out about the missing jug. "And he did say," declared the conscienceless Uncle Billy with a sly smile, "that an arrow tipped with a blue jay's feather couldn't help but fall somewhere pretty close to that jug of his with no handle to it. I allowed to give it a trial, but I've never got to it."

Steve and Bob, however, lost no time in making trial of the seemingly magical arrow. It must be recorded that after two or three disappointments Bob Liscomb, always a bit wanting in active imagination, expressed the belief that further effort was useless. And though Steve reluctantly admitted that success had not been achieved, he nevertheless held to the opinion that the fault might lie in the arrow, and that it would be a good plan to rig several arrows in different ways.

When Billy Fee said that the plan should certainly bring results, especially in the "sucker" season, Steve recognized the gardener's crude joke and chuckled over it with no show of ill humor; but he still held to the idea that the fall of a specially prepared arrow should be a logical way of locating the legendary treasure. "For," said he, "there is some way or another to do everything. How'd folks ever find out how to get rid of warts till somebody thought of tying a string around 'em, then burying the string under a mullen stalk at midnight? An' that done the trick!"

Beyond doubt, it was this firm spirit and bright optimism in Steve Holworth's nature which caused other boys to turn to him for leadership as naturally as tendrils reach out to objects more staunch or bolder than themselves. And, as usual, this was true on the occasion of the discovery that the dam at White Sucker Pool was wrecked and the swimming hole a sad mockery of the beauties it had so lately known.

But to start at the beginning of this adventure, it should be said that after the usual June freshet, Plum Creek so receded between its grass-bordered, rocky banks that no first-rate swimming place remained. Planning to

restore White Sucker Pool at least to a higher level, Steve Holworth, Bob Liscomb and a few other Glencoburn boys built a dam across the outlet of this natural basin and with eager expectancy watched the waters rise. With vast satisfaction, too, they saw the broad channel filled, not by the strong current of flood time but by a gentle, foam-flecked flow, so clear and bright that the trees and even the blue sky above seemed to lie in the depths of it.

In addition to being a fine swimming place, the White Sucker hole presented many other attractions. For here the valley of Plum Creek was fairly broad. Back from the second terrace of the shelving hillside rose broken, rocky ledges, but between them and the water was open ground and grassy nooks among outcropping stones. Beneath scattered beeches and maples were beds of moss most cool and inviting to lie upon. Here in their season red strawberries nestled beneath their shining leaves. In August blackberries were plentiful.

The boys found marked advantage in their pool being near the Upper Road; for it was by this grass-grown, winding thoroughfare that Plum's Pastures and Plum Creek in the midst of them were most readily reached from

their quarter of the city. This was known as the Upper Town. The other part of Glencoburn was known as the Lower Town. Here were the quarries and the factories for making grindstones and similar products. The city was the capital of a prosperous midwest county.

For a week the dam-builders enjoyed their improved and much prized swimming place and all the beauties of its surroundings. The thought that Black Sucker Pool, down toward the Lower Road, might be rather the worse by reason of their checking Plum Creek's lazy summer flow never entered their minds. Secure in their vast wealth, trouble and care might be for others but not for them. So much the greater were their surprise and vexation then, when high misfortune stood suddenly before them. For as Steve and Bob, together with three or four others, one day arrived at the pool, eager for a plunge into the cool embrace of the waters after the hot trudge over the hills, they found their dam in ruins. And, even worse, there had been dredging and ditching below the basin, thus letting out far more than the normal overflow.

"Thunder an' Mike!" Steve Holworth exploded wrathfully. "Thunder an' Mike!" he

repeated with fierce energy. "Fellows, I bet a million dollars I know who did it!"

"Well, who done it? Nobody ever comes here! Who done it, then?" Bob Liscomb was far too heated to reckon with mere verbs. "Tell me who done it! I'll poke their face for 'em!"

"It's your Grindstone bunch, that's who! Look here, now! I'll tell ye something!" Steve did not state at once what he intended telling, for there arose a hurricane of affirmative interruptions—"Yeah, I bet ye! The Grindstoners, sure as anything! The lousy pups!"

The very mention of the Grindstone gentry had quickly made the picture clear. Not that these boys from the Lower Town fairly deserved the scornful term applied to them, but that they were a hostile force and one which the Upper Town boys had more than once encountered, especially in Plum's Pastures.

"Now I'll tell you something," said Steve Holworth, his gaze bent thoughtfully upon the wide gap in the dam and the shallow waters back of it. The chorus of rage and resentment which had drowned his earlier words subsided now and all eyes turned to him inquiringly. "It's a good guess," he continued, "that we're going to find that the

Grindstone gang cut our dam, not just to be low-down mean, but to steal our water after copying our plan to make a bang-up swimming place. Who wants to slip down to the Black Sucker hole with me, just to see if that ain't what they've been up to?"

"Better all of us go!" said Eddie Fenlow, forcibly. "If there's enough of 'em around, and they get one look at us, it will be stand up to a fight, or run; and I can't run for stewed prunes."

"Naw, we don't want to go looking for trouble. It will never get you anywhere," Steve urged.

Nevertheless the discussion was concluded at once and as by common consent all the boys took to the narrow trail. Stealthily they proceeded downstream, well concealed by the boulders and frequent thickets bordering the bank.

From a bit of higher ground screened by a growth of dogwood, the scouting party presently had a good view of the Black Sucker Pool. At once it was apparent that Steve's surmising had been well founded. The boys from the neighborhood of the grindstone works and the quarries had dammed the creek. Obviously, they had hastened the filling of their pool by cutting the dam above.

At this moment a half-dozen of their number were enjoying the results of their labors and their invasion of Upper Road territory.

"There's Red Kaggy for one, an' Grouchy Garlic with him," Steve Holworth spoke in guarded tones while from one viewpoint and another his followers peeped through the brush to identify the enemy. All whispered, for they were on hostile soil and in the muscular, red-headed and red-faced Kaggy the Grindstone gang had a leader greatly to be reckoned with. The foe identified by Steve as Grouchy Garlic was Nick Delanti, a stocky youngster, swarthy skinned and physically powerful. In him the Kaggy leadership had a staunch lieutenant. It was chiefly through these two that other boys of the Quarry district who sailed under their flag of belligerency had gained a rough name not only among the Upper Town lads but also in their own section of the city.

"Humph! now that they have all the water they want, we could fix up our dam and they would have no excuse for cutting it another time," Steve announced thoughtfully. For he saw nothing to gain and much to lose in presenting any immediate remonstrance as to what had already been done.

No one replied at once for from their cover

each was watching the sports of those at the pool below. Suddenly Steve caught his breath, startled as by an electric spark. Eddie Fenlow was far down on the lower bank of the naturally terraced ground, gingerly making his way through a thicket of hazel brush toward the swimming hole.

"Say! what's he up to?" demanded Holworth in low tones, half turning to Bob Liscomb beside him.

"He's going to take care of their clothes for 'em. Somebody might come along an' swipe 'em," Bob grinned. "It's his own little scheme. Gee, I hope he can make it!"

"Thunder an' Mike! Why didn't you stop him? He has sand enough, but no sense. They'll just about murder him if they catch him!" Steve smiled, but very dubiously, as he turned again to watch the advancing figure below. "Say, all of you," he urged in undertones, "keep your eyes open! If those Grindstoners get one peep at Ed, it's a free-for-all, and there's nothing to do but get into it—the faster, the better."

CHAPTER II

HELL YAWNS

With almost breathless interest the five boys on the upper ground watched Fenlow stealthily approach the heap of wearing apparel the Lower Road youngsters had left under a willow ten yards from the water's edge. Certainly Eddie's was a brainless enterprise and, as a group, the boys would never have voted for it. But when their mischief-loving friend had involved himself in danger and difficulty, even without their consent, there was not one unwilling to stand by. With the zest of high adventure thumping in their hearts, they awaited the outcome. All eyes noted each cautious movement of the creeping figure advancing foot by foot, nearer and nearer to the sorry garments of Red Kaggy and his followers.

Undetected, Fenlow had gained the open ground beneath the willow. He was laying hold of shirts and pants when a startled yell

broke the silence. Unseen by Eddie or his friends, a member of the Kaggy group had been ensconced behind the thick trunk of a willow while he removed the soiled, frayed bandages from a sore toe. The chance sentinel shouting the alarm, his companions flew from the water like hornets from a suddenly disturbed nest. At the same instant came a wild rush from the shelving bank above. Immediately there was in progress such a scrimmage as can be better imagined than described. The air seemed full of hands, arms, legs and feet in rapid, violent action.

Tending to offset any advantage possessed by the Kaggy gang in age and weight, and so more nearly balancing the opposing forces, was the fact that Grouchy Garlic was out of the fray before he was fairly in it. Tripping on a root of the willow, he so wrenched an ankle that he lay, whiter than he had been in many a day, groaning and howling by turns, while the battle raged about him.

In hardly more than one great leap Red Kaggy had piled his muscular, bony frame upon the marauding Fenlow just as he sprang to escape. Eddie speedily proved himself no weak antagonist despite his lighter weight, but under Red's great reach and steel-like body he had slim chance. He would have been

counted out in short order but for Steve Holworth's timely arrival. And even when the latter dug hands and fingers into Kaggy's hair and neck, diverting the latter's fiery attention to himself, poor Fenlow lay for some seconds breathing heavily before he returned to the battle.

In a rush of rage Red Kaggy had turned his attention to Holworth alone. Springing back, Steve met his first fierce onset with fairly good boxing tactics and stopped the leap which would have sent him instantly and heavily to the ground. But he missed a right swing for Kaggy's jaw and, overbalanced, he was almost falling when Red's heavy frame alighted full upon him. Together they went down as if a boulder from the ledge above had crashed to the valley.

Except for the prompt return of Eddie Fenlow, Steve would have been lucky to escape with no bones broken. Against both lads however, when Eddie had put himself fairly astride Red's neck, the Grindstone leader was forced to yield. Springing suddenly free of the two of them, he stood glaring and panting. Even Ed Fenlow's visage was no more blood-stained than his own.

"You started this! I'm goin' to finish it!" he yelled, and seizing a broken spade that lay

near, he swung the flat side of it viciously for Steve's head. Fortunately the latter dodged the blow. Before Red could recover his footing, there rang loudly above the tumult of battle Bob Liscomb's hurried cry, "Travel! Get going, everybody! Look what's coming!"

Instantly facing about, Steve saw heavy reinforcements swooping down to the aid of the Grindstoners. Four or five additional members of Red's gang were approaching at a run, as if they had scented battle from afar. In wisdom born of experience, the Upper Town boys followed fast at Bob's heels; and though they quitted the field ingloriously, they left no man behind, and to the foe no greater trophy than a sleeve of Ed Fenlow's shirt and Bob Liscomb's battered cap.

"And as to that," young Mr. Liscomb declared with some philosophy, as he bathed a swollen eye at the White Sucker Pool, "now let me tell you something. I'd rather lose that cap than eat a good meal. I would, for a fact! My brother got it and wore the lining out of it, and then it came to me. I could never get rid of it because the next one in our family is a girl. I tell you straight, this is my lucky day."

So ended the battle of Fenlow's Folly, as Steve Holworth called it. For, he said, noth-

ing was gained more than to incite the enemy to further depredations in Upper Road territory. In the face of such probable fresh invasions, it was with real misgivings that the boys repaired their dam and discussed plans for guarding it in future. However, having plenty of water now in their own pool, those of the Lower Road were apparently content to forego further immediate hostilities. Yet the battle described was but one of a number which occurred at one time and another.

As the summers slipped away, each was busier than the last for both the Upper and the Lower Road boys. With increase of years and stature they came to increased duties and new interests. The days they spent at Plum Creek and up and down the silent, deserted hills and woodlands of Plum's Pastures were more and more infrequent.

An adventure Steve Holworth and Bob Liscomb had here, however, at about the period of their second year in high school is worth recording. To settle an old argument as to the character and depth of the black and awful pit among the rocks which bore the weird name Hell Yawns, they decided to examine the grim abyss as thoroughly as possible.

Equipped with ropes, a lantern and a crude grappling hook contrived from the business ends of a pair of garden rakes, they set forth one morning to make a day of it. In earlier time they had been required to promise faithfully that they would not venture near the pit and, indeed, they had such wholesome fear of the spot they were little likely to do so. But now, in the full confidence of youth at sixteen years, they little feared the frightful hole and a lively curiosity gave zest to the present enterprise.

Nevertheless it was with trepidation that they removed the small logs with which someone had thoughtfully covered the pit's mouth. This had been done long ago, and the timbers were far gone in decay. Carelessly trusting his weight to one of them, Steve was near to being precipitated into the terrible chasm. This made them the more nervous as both crept forward on hands and knees to look down. Nothing was to be seen. Far below there seemed a dull shining as of water; but at the end of a fifty-foot rope a lighted lantern failed to show water for a certainty. Joining two such lines, the boys satisfied themselves that the water was at a depth of about one hundred feet. Almost immediately, however, the dull gleam of their light was

extinguished as the lantern swung at the rope's end, and they could only conclude that this was due to poisonous gases in the depths of the frightful place.

Attached to one hundred and twenty feet of line, the grappling hook touched bottom at one spot, but in an opposite position the hole dropped lower still and with one hundred and fifty feet of line Bob could reach bottom with the grappling hook only by leaning low and putting an arm far down into the yawning pit. By chance, he caught some object on the improvised hook and with much care drew it up. Broad sunlight showed the discovery to be a bone, much discolored by long immersion.

"Looks like the forearm of a man—maybe Philander Plum's," said Steve nervously, yet studiously. "I wonder if the two-gallon jug might be down there," he smiled.

"Maybe so; but it better stay right there. Anyhow, it has no handle, you'll remember," Bob returned, as if he might have had some intention of grappling for the jug, but saw it as a risky prospect. He looked at the bone the hook had brought up and took it into his hands questioningly. "You've had physiology; is this the bone of a sheep, or what?" he challenged.

"See if you can get another, to match it up with," Steve hedged.

Again Bob Liscomb let down the grappling hook. Again he stretched far out and down into the gaping black hole—leaned more and more, one hand and forearm upon the rocky ledge at the top, the other extended low into the abyss and stretching toward the farther side.

A cry—a smothered groan—and just as his hand slipped and the upper portion of Bob's body was dropping into the fearful pit, Steve Holworth threw all his weight upon his companion's legs. By a margin such as is said to turn black hair white in a single night, Bob's life was saved. Even so, it was only with the greatest care and their united, sturdy efforts that he was helped up and wholly out of danger. For a time he lay white, breathing hard, a few feet from the treacherous brink.

"Hell Yawns is right!" he smiled feebly, at last. "No one would ever reach the other place by that route!"

Steve had been scarcely less unnerved but he, too, smiled feebly. "Well then, let's not try it," he agreed.

"I've seen all I want to see down there," said Bob, still white, but rallying.

"I don't want to see anything. You can tell me exactly what it looks like, halfway down or more," Steve grinned. "Did you get your eyes on the two-gallon jug?"

"Yes, I did. But as Philander Plum has always said, it seemed to have no handle; and I couldn't exactly see what was in the thing," he went on ironically. "Better look around, if you think of going down, and get the rope and hook. Bring Billy Fee's old garden rake, too! Else they're down there to stay forever!"

The story of how nearly Bob had gone down to frightful death—by what a hairbreadth chance Steve had seized him, was told and told again in Glencoburn. Few people visited Plum's Pastures, but the fearsome abyss known as Hell Yawns was by reputation sufficiently familiar to all. Even grown men were wont to caution one another to put aside any curiosity they might have concerning the depths of the pit.

This, said Uncle Billy Fee, the accepted philosopher of all the Upper Town despite his humble gardener's station—This, said he, was as it should be. "For," he observed further, "people in general are about as dumb as anything can be. If they have brains, which ain't often the case, they don't use 'em.

Nothin' but heaven's unendin' mercy leads 'em in when it rains."

From the time of the Hell Yawns adventure, a couple of years had slipped by. Lately graduated from high school with all the pomp and circumstance which annually marked the commencement exercises in Glencoburn, Steve Holworth was looking forward to a course at State University. One morning he discussed the question of a future career with Elizabeth Aldervale, two or three years his junior. She had been a playmate during childhood days, and, he hoped, was still his very good friend notwithstanding the greater wealth and advantages by which she was surrounded. They were seated in the lawn swing beneath the tall silver maples bordering the drive of the old-time Aldervale mansion. Uncle Billy Fee was clipping the turf along the driveway. As he came opposite, Elizabeth turned to him.

"What do you think of Steve going to college, Uncle Billy?" she asked.

From babyhood she had been a great favorite with the gardener and he had influenced all her views and opinions. At sixteen she still highly valued the gardener's counsel and usually she approved his eccentric utterances though she might smile at them.

In response to her present question, Uncle Billy straightened up, grass-shears in hand. Even in his blue overalls, blue shirt and broad-brimmed straw hat, he had all the look of a friar of old. His large calm eyes, close-cut hair, rotund and shaven face, ample girth and breadth of back needed only the olden cowl to complete the picture. His deliberate, full-throated voice heightened the likeness as he said, "Why, as for Steve goin' to college, I'd say he better do it. It may do some good. Whatever gives a hope of bringin' out a bit of that intelligence the Creator naturally intended folks to have, ought to be a good investment. But it's a queer market. The more cash a young fellow takes to it, the less he seems to bring home."

"I won't be very badly handicapped by surplus coin, and so will probably get my money's worth," Steve smiled.

"You're a sight more likely not to," said Uncle Billy firmly. "In a passable garden, I can generally make out to raise a few poor potatoes or something. But brains is a crop that very few succeed with. Mostly, the seed is poor."

Though he spoke kindly, there was something so personally disparaging in the old man's remarks that Steve looked at Elizabeth.

It was as if he hoped for a comforting glance to suggest, "Don't take this seriously;" but he saw only that she quite approved all that Uncle Billy said, as she very often did, indeed.

Steve's self-confidence, his feeling of sufficiency and his general notion that his conquest of State University would be rather a simple matter were shaken. His vanity was given just such an unpleasant rub as lies in violently brushing the hair the wrong way. Well, it was pretty much his own choice whether he should or should not go to college, he reflected. But again, what cared he for the opinion or the remarks of a simple gardener? And if old Billy Fee rated him as being doubtful college timber—again, what cared he?

Such thoughts still gripped Steve's reflections when in the late afternoon Bob Liscomb telephoned to say:

"If you aren't sure booked for college, Steve, I know where you can land a pretty good job."

"What d'ye mean, pretty good job?" asked Steve Holworth. "But, never mind," he added, "I'm to be down town, and I'll drop in to see you."

CHAPTER III

THE BANK BANDIT

"There's about ten big cart-wheels a week in it, right off," said Bob Liscomb, back of the soda counter at his father's drug store. "No heavy work, and you wear a white collar—spats, if you like," and he smiled encouragingly.

Steve Holworth occupied a stool at an end of the counter, too completely absorbed in thought to notice Bob's humor, and the latter continued:

"It's a good job and you'd be called a storekeeper. Here's how it works, as I've seen it when I helped Billy Donnelly. Suppose a foreman out in the quarry wants some drills. He sends an order to the storekeeper for 'em. The storekeeper passes 'em out, and later sends the order on along the proper line so that the drills get charged against the work. He looks over his stock of drills and all the stuff they use, and if any item is low, or when

it comes to a certain quantity, he sends a memorandum to the purchasing department and they have to buy some. When new stock comes along, the storekeeper must stow it. There's not much else to it. Eight hours a day, ten bucks a week and you live at home." Again Bob smiled encouragingly.

"What's the job ahead of it?" asked Steve, more soberly. "Where do I get off? Where do I land later on—five, ten years from now?"

"Gosh! There's always a chance to work up! Here I am dishin' out sodas and hairnets, story magazines and what-have-you. Am I to be doing it all my life? Why, not so's you could notice it! I just naturally work up. In a few years I'm a registered pharmacist and get my hundred a month or more. Of course this is my folks' store, but I'd have about the same stuff in any store. Now suppose I plug away here for four years and save some money too, I hope, and you go to college for four years. To college you go, then; sounds good; high hat and maybe quite a lot of fun. But it costs you three or four thousand dollars and when you get through you get a job at just about fifty or sixty a month, and you still have to work up."

Bob's eyes twinkled in sheer satisfaction with his argument and his ability in present-

ing it. Steve's face was seriously thoughtful, as it had been from the beginning. "Maybe so," he said. "I suppose a man must get the practical side after he gets out of school. There's an old joke that the only job where they start at the top is the well digger's. I don't mind saying that right now ten a week sounds pretty good, and what I'm trying to do is make sure of myself. If Bill Donnelly is leaving and can get the place for me, why, it does sound interesting; and it does look easy. But the chance to work up from a place where there's not much to know and nothing much to learn—what do I work up to?"

"Plain as mud," Bob returned, still encouragingly. He did hate to see Steve go off to State University. He firmly believed his boyhood chum would do well in any place, and Glencoburn should be as good as another. "Here's how it works," he continued. "You become known to men higher up. You make a pretty good record. Sometime there comes a vacancy on up the line, and they move you up to it. Your ten a week just naturally becomes thirty or forty or better, all in a few years."

"Now you come to what I'm thinking of," Steve slowly answered. "For an untrained man, thirty or forty is getting close to the

limit. Your father pays a pharmacist twice as much as he gives an untrained man."

"Gee whiz! The pharmacist probably started as a clerk!" Bob retorted good-naturedly.

"Yes, but if he meant to follow the drug business, he didn't start in a shoe store. I'd like to be a mechanical engineer; I'd like to help run some factory. I could get a factory job, perhaps; but if I haven't the technical stuff, a foremanship is about as far as I might hope to get. No, the only lure about the job at the quarries is the lure of a comfortable place and ten a week, right off. That's the deuce of it! I lean to it and yet I can't bear the thought of it. What am I to do?"

"Thunder an' Mike! I know what you're going to do! You're going off to college. You've got the bug and once you get a bug! I'm not that way. I go along and take what comes. But it never was in you to do that, Steve. Back in Plum's Pastures, long ago, you kept on looking for ways to find Philander's jug years after I had said, 'What's the use of fiddlin' away with that thing any more?' Sure you're going to college, though I could easily wish you weren't. When do you get away?"

"I ought to go within a week," Steve smiled, and he sighed as if relieved of doubt and uncertainty. "I can't exactly count on my time. The Gasbys keep staving off a settlement on the new block, and father looked to the finishing of that job for some family coin. I have coming the wages he allowed me this summer and that would be for my clothes. Dad is willing to see me through on regular expenses. Anyhow, though, until he gets a settlement with Mr. Gasby, he has everything tied up, and that's that."

"Yeah! Gasby's that way," Bob returned with emphasis. "You'd be surprised. Any store that knows 'em will tell you the same thing. Nothing they get is just right. Richest man in town, and the hardest to get a nickel out of. And, oh yes! Joe Gasby goes back to State next week. You and he might get to be quite chummy," Bob grinned.

"Yes, regular pals," Steve smiled. "Especially a Junior and a Freshman."

As Bob turned to wait on a customer now entering, he made no reply. Leaving the store, Steve walked down to the new and as yet wholly unoccupied Gasby business block, the erection of which had been a contract engaging his father's time and capital for many months. In one of the empty store-

rooms he found the contractor, Pliny Holworth, and the owner, Henry Gasby, in heated conversation. It was enough to know that, as usual, Mr. Gasby was engaged in his endless fault-finding and, long since weary of the man's small tactics, Steve had no desire to hear him further. He turned homeward and as a vision of his father failing to make a settlement with Mr. Gasby came to his inner view, he thought again of the storekeeping job at the quarries. "Ten a week," he reflected. "I never have had anything like regular money of my own. It wouldn't go bad at all."

Still pondering, Steve reached home. On the shady porch he found his mother busy with some mending. Mrs. Holworth seemed always to be busy with something. The mother of two boys in a home where no help other than a weekly laundress is employed is likely to be busy. Yet Mrs. Holworth never failed to have time to talk with Steve or with Martin, his younger brother, making their problems and their interests her own. Steve very frankly told her of the situation Bob Liscomb proposed to obtain for him. "How would four or five dollars a week in real money for my board sound to you, mother?"

"Stephen Holworth at State University

studying to make something of himself sounds more to my liking," she answered. "And Stephen Holworth, as a man, is going to do no more than in earlier years he has prepared himself to do."

"You're overlooking cash money, mother," Steve smiled. But as this brought only a glance of mild scorn, his own face grew sober again. Silently, he looked away across the bit of lawn and the pavement of the narrow street before the Holworth home. Beyond the low board fence over the way, Uncle Billy Fee was working among the dahlias in the Aldervale garden. The Aldervale residence faced Broad Street. The imposing Aldervale grounds extended from that thoroughfare to the Holworths' street at the rear. But it was not of the better home and finer surroundings that Steve was thinking, though from his earliest years these things had influenced his thoughts. Rather, he pondered upon an observation he had lately heard from the lips of the humble gardener. "Fine houses and fine clothes are no sure sign of anything more than money," Uncle Billy had remarked. "Real wealth is a rich mind."

"Mother," spoke Steve at last, "I can't see the end of any road that I might follow. Maybe it's a toss-up as to whether I take one

or another. But it stands to reason that if a man pitches into anything of account without training, he won't get to first base. And so I'm going on with school, and that's settled. If I could say the same for father's account with Mr. Gasby, I'd soon be ready."

"You should," Mrs. Holworth assented, and as she went within to start preparations for supper, Steve picked up the evening paper. A page-wide headline told of a bank robbery in the near-by town of Starling. With interest Steve noted that a woman bandit had entered the establishment of the Starling Banking Company just at the close of business. Though the doors were not locked, the shades were drawn and tellers were counting the day's cash. Without a word, but by signs sufficiently reinforced by a gun in each hand, the robber had driven the cashier, teller and stenographer, the only persons in the bank at the time, into an inner coat closet and locked them in.

This bold move might have been more successful had it not been that in this closet Cashier George Gorse kept a couple of spare revolvers. Arming himself, he climbed up to the transom above the door and let go two shots just as the bandit had finished scooping all currency in sight into a traveling bag. The

robber did not return the fire but with astonishing coolness walked out of the bank, adjusting her hat and coat as she went and closing the door behind her.

Some minutes elapsed before the bank's people were able to break through the closet door and give the alarm. The town marshal and a score of citizens were quickly upon the scene, but the bandit had disappeared. A few drops of blood upon the floor proved that at least one shot from the cashier's gun had taken effect, though evidently not seriously, for the woman's get-away was complete. The escape had been the more easily accomplished by reason of the fact that at this hour nearly all the village was gathered in the town park, several blocks distant, for the Chautauqua concerts and lectures then in progress.

Cashier George Gorse was inclined to the opinion that the robber was a man dressed in woman's clothes. Both the teller and stenographer, however, believed otherwise; and as Mr. Gorse's glasses had fallen off when he climbed up to the transom, he could express no confident judgment one way or the other.

Save for Jack Foley, ticket agent at the railroad station, no one was found who had noticed the strange woman in the village. Mr. Foley said he had seen such a person walking

toward town from the railroad station a short time before the robbery occurred. The town marshal and the sheriff said the robbery was quite certainly the work of a professional who made himself or herself wholly familiar with surroundings before staging the hold-up. The bank's loss would have been much greater than eight thousand dollars had the bandit not been driven off before entering the vault.

Thinking of the robbery, Steve believed the fact that the robber spoke no word indicated that the supposed woman was really a man in feminine apparel. A masculine voice would have shown as much. Yet he could not understand how the bandit quickly and completely disappeared in the wide streets and open spaces of Starling in broad daylight. Slowly, however, he turned his mental inquiries to his own problems. Though he had declared his mind made up, Bob Liscomb's arguments still came trooping back before him; and thus he was engaged when supper was announced.

CHAPTER IV

RED KAGGY

Pliny Holworth was a large, ruddy-faced man, little given to conversation though usually quietly cheerful. As the family gathered about the table this evening, however, his face was clouded. It was unlike him. He rarely brought home the cares of business. He was devoted to his family and his pride lay there and in the respectable fact that their home was paid for. He had pride, too, in the knowledge that, having accomplished so much, he had then saved enough money to branch out from his work as a plain carpenter to the greater sphere of contractor and builder. More recently his greatest pride in a business way had been the Gasby block, lately completed. This was his largest venture and a contract reaching considerable figures.

Indeed the erection of the Gasby block had attracted bidders from a distance. But Pliny Holworth knew—or thought he knew—Henry

Gasby as a wealthy and responsible man of his own town. In turn, Gasby knew him as a competent workman and honest fellow citizen; and in the face of sharp competition Henry Gasby had said to Pliny Holworth, "Go ahead with the job. Get going as soon as possible." A bit flattered, perhaps, Mr. Holworth started work at once. Subsequently, however, it had taken no little urging to bring Mr. Gasby to the signing of the written contract. He asked one concession and another as to certain points of the specifications. The contractor yielded to demands he could ill afford, but the work went forward and at last the agreement bore the signature of Henry Gasby.

Save for vexations over matters wherein the contract as drawn by Mr. Gasby was not clear, the work had come to completion with a moderate degree of satisfaction and on time. It was a late day for criticisms and objections on Mr. Gasby's part, but he presented them, delaying payment. Indeed, the partial payments which should have been made as the work advanced had been quite neglected by the owner; and now it was apparent to the family of Pliny Holworth, as he sat with them at table, that serious differences had arisen. In response to Mrs. Holworth's inquiry about

the settlement he only said, "I am to meet Mr. Gasby tomorrow."

Later, as Steve spoke of his decision to continue in school and to enter State University, Mr. Holworth said encouragingly, "It's a good choice. It is not likely you will do so, but even if you should land eventually with me in the building business, I'd not be sorry. Things become more technical—more difficult for the plain, practical man every year. In the old days, mortar was mortar and yellow pine was yellow pine. Now there are grades and tests for everything and it takes a Philadelphia lawyer and a college engineer to say just how specifications read."

"Well, if ever I got through college, I wouldn't stick around this burg long!" Voicing this determination, young Martin Holworth seemed to challenge his older brother.

"Humph!" said Steve, "you might be glad to have a chance in your daddy's business."

"I'll give you steak and mushrooms for supper tomorrow night, Steve, if you will find the mushrooms," Mrs. Holworth interrupted, tactfully suppressing an argument, as she often did. No doubt she was thinking, too, that Steve would not have many more meals at the family table.

"Sure—yes!" was the answer. "There are mushrooms in Plum's Pastures this year," Steve went on. "I'll be there at the crack o' dawn!"

Good as his word, Steve Holworth was early abroad the following morning, out upon the narrow, winding Upper Road, leading back to the hills and valleys where he had often played in boyhood. It was a morning of dense, low clouds and heavy ground mists scarcely stirring in the motionless, moist air. The early sun was hidden and darkness as of twilight still dimmed the hills and valleys. Leaving the winding road, Steve turned into the old trail and, keeping to the higher ground, followed a footpath amid the rocks and brush. Thus he came to another path which, branching from the hillside trail, descended into the valley. Not many yards before him lay the gaping mouth of the black pit, Hell Yawns. He paused.

He thought there might be mushrooms upon the spring-watered slopes hereabout, yet the better prospects lay in the valley and along the grassy banks of Plum Creek. The lower ground was still wrapped in semi-darkness and Steve decided to await the lifting of the fog. He found a rock to serve him as a seat. From the dim hollow below came the cawing

of a crow. So clear and so like a human voice were the long-drawn notes that the listener's thoughts turned readily to the old tales of Philander Plum—to the old legend that in time of mist and calm one might hear Philander's phantom voice calling the sheep.

Mingling with his revery upon the curious tales of Plum's Pastures, Steve was presently conscious of something almost ghostly—a heavy breathing, a low moaning sound as of some person in pain. This must be fancy, he thought, yet even as he so decided, he heard a muffled groan, and again low moaning, not far to his right. In the mist and gloom it seemed coming from Hell Yawns. For a few seconds he sat motionless, a bit frightened. His first impulse was to cry out, but he did not. Instead, he crept cautiously toward the black pit.

A few yards thus, and as Steve came very near the abyss, his breathless quest abruptly ended. Flat on his face, close-clipped red hair bathed by the moisture of the fog, bare red neck so pale that the freckles stood out upon it as brown islands in a muddy sea, unconscious and evidently very sick, was Red Kaggy. With each slow and labored breath a moan gurgled in his throat and trembled on his open lips. Beside his outstretched hand lay a heavy

revolver. Near by was a heavy canvas bag, grimy and worn. The protruding handle of a long wrench and the shoulder straps of blue overalls which also fell outside marked the sack as a workman's tool kit. Clearly, or so Steve for the moment believed, Red Kaggy had fallen and sustained serious injury when going to or from his work.

A year had passed since Steve had seen or so much as heard of this leader of the Grindstone gang of boyhood days. For a much longer time there had been no battles with Red and his followers, but the old enmity had continued. On Kaggy's part old scores and old grudges were unforgotten. To the contrary, Steve had been willing to leave the old hostilities back with his boyhood. He had outgrown the old taunts, the old, petty injuries. Red had been employed at the quarries after leaving school while still in the grammar grades. Later, Steve heard of him as being an apprentice plumber. This was the report of Nick Delanti, otherwise Grouchy Garlic. Nick had lately worked as a laborer for Mr. Holworth in and about the Gasby block. He seemed more willing to erase old scores than Red Kaggy had ever been, but his sullen temper won him no friends and he clung to his old leader.

Thoughts of these things may have been in Steve's mind, but he lost no time in trying to restore Kaggy to his senses. For want of a better receptacle, he used his cupped hands to bring water from the hillside spring. Bathing Red's face and head, he saw signs of returning consciousness. But he must have water in greater quantity. The canvas tool bag might serve, and, springing to the thought, Steve seized it by the bottom and turned its contents out upon the ground. In sudden amazement he caught his breath. Fright swept over him and he stood trembling with excitement. Before his astonished eyes there lay a woman's hat, dress, shoes, hosiery and coat; and fluttering in a passing breeze was loosely wadded paper money and, in such packages as banks assemble, much more money lay before him.

The brief time Steve needed to collect his startled wits enabled him to grasp the evident truth. Red Kaggy was the Starling bank robber—Red Kaggy the woman bandit! For a moment he felt that he must flee the spot. Run—get away—anywhere. Not that he needed to escape the helpless Kaggy, but that he must avoid being involved in the latter's guilty secret. Why had Red come back here? Had he planned to throw the incriminating

feminine apparel into the depths of Hell Yawns? Had he thought that here in the isolation of Plum's Pastures he would find safe hiding for his loot?

Summoning his courage, Steve hastily brought water in the tool bag as he had set out to do. Alternating the bathing with chafing Red's wrists between his palms, he slowly brought the senseless young man back to a state of consciousness. Suddenly a startled look came into Kaggy's face. With an effort he sat up and looked about him sharply.

"What you doin' here?" he demanded hoarsely. "What's it to you if a man comes here to rest?"

"Don't kid yourself, Red. You're badly hurt. I wonder you ever got this far."

Red Kaggy's eyes took in all the situation slowly. With a lowering scowl he looked at the tool bag still holding a quantity of water. He looked at the clothing and the money scattered upon the ground. He raised his eyes to his Good Samaritan, but it was as if he wished the latter had passed by on the other side—a thousand miles on the other side. A sneer came to his pale lips.

"Well, what ye goin' to do about it?" he demanded in gruff contempt, but his hand

was slipping cautiously toward the gun that still lay near.

Steve saw the stealthy movement. "Better not," he said and, seizing the weapon, put it into his own hip pocket.

"You always was a dirty sneak," Kaggy muttered, looking him full in the eyes. "A sneakin' cur!"

"How do you feel about getting to a hospital?" Steve demanded coolly.

"Yeah, hospital!" the fellow sneered again. "But I tell you what, you! There's good money kickin' around there on the grass. A man came chasin' through the Pastures an' dropped the bag when he saw me. He plugged me with lead for yellin' at him. But wherever he got it, there's real money. Help yerself and say nothin'. That's fair!"

"Oh, talk sense!" Steve growled. "But you better not talk at all—That's what happens! You've faded away again."

There could be no doubt about it. Kaggy's faint strength had failed him, and once more he lay senseless, as one dying. Calmly as he could, Steve opened the man's clothing. As he suspected, he found a bullet wound. It was in Red's right side. There had been a bungling attempt to dress the wound by means of a polka-dot cotton handkerchief and some

coarse twine. As best he could and by the use of his own belt and handkerchief, Steve rebound the injury. He gathered the scattered currency of the Bank of Starling into the tool bag and similarly stowed the feminine apparel. He threw the strap of the kit over his shoulder and stooped to gather the still unconscious Kaggy into his arms.

The fellow opened his eyes. At once he sensed the meaning of Steve's position over him. "Let me be, damn ye!" he cursed. "Let me be—an' if ye don't, I'll sure fix your clock! If I wait a thousand years to do it, I'll throw your dirty carcass into Hell Yawns! Mind! I'll pitch you to the bottom of that hole there, if I hang for it! Let me be! I—"

"Oh, talk sense," Steve growled again, though to little purpose, for loss of blood and exhaustion had left Kaggy too weak for words. Once more he was unconscious. Nor did he regain his senses completely until he opened his eyes in Bartlett Memorial Hospital in Glencoburn.

Thanks to a summer of handling lumber, carrying a hod and helping the builders as he could, Steve had been able to carry the senseless fugitive a long mile to Dr. Stoner's summer place near town. Two or three times Kaggy had shown resistance. Always he con-

tinued his threats, though more and more feebly.

"Can't you understand that you're just about dying, you poor fish?" Steve vainly tried to reason with him. "It's a cinch you don't appreciate this, but I should worry."

CHAPTER V

HOLWORTH'S DECISION

For a day or two Steve Holworth found himself a hero. It was bothersome and embarrassing. As he viewed the matter, he had done for poor Red Kaggy the least and most that anyone could do. Nor did he think there was much heroism in toting to a doctor a man too weak to remain conscious five minutes at a stretch. He ardently wished it had not fallen to him to find Kaggy or to save his life; or, at least, since such was the fact, that it had not been to the end that Red must eventually land in jail.

When word came from Starling that, in the absence of the bank's president, the directors had come to no decision as to offering a reward for the apprehension of the robber, Steve was more glad than sorry. And he hoped that someone would let Red Kaggy know how he felt—that no thought of personal gain or anything of the kind had

prompted any part of what he had done.

Few people knew the whole story of the adventure. Outside his own family Steve told no one but Bob Liscomb of Red's offer to share his plunder in return for aid and silence.

"Of course you did right," Bob observed, thoughtfully, "but for myself, I think I'd have given it the once-over. Three or four thousand dollars, and no one the wiser! Not so bad."

"Not so good, either," Steve smiled. "Looks like easy money, but is it? Hardly. Who'd trade a good clean bed for a buggy one, when he knows he's got to sleep in it all the rest of his life?"

Bob shrugged his shoulders in assent, but he did go on to argue that the Bank of Starling should do something handsome for Steve. With an impatient wave of his hand the latter frowned down further discussion of the subject. For he was too much troubled with his own affairs not to be a little irritable when others insisted upon talking of the Plum's Pastures adventure. The whole subject wearied him. His school plans were all awry. There had been no settlement with Henry Gasby. There was nothing from that gentleman but new reasons for temporizing and delay.

As to this, the final blow came suddenly. Henry Gasby called Pliny Holworth to his office. With lagging steps the latter walked home after their brief interview. To his family he could say only: "The building is rejected. Rejected! That's bad enough; but the worst is that my copy of specifications is lost and it may be some trouble to prove, as I've got to do, that the work squares with them. We set out to follow just what we were given to follow, to the last eight-penny nail. The papers were handled carelessly, there's no doubt about that. We were so bound to be so exact that half a dozen of us used the specifications pretty often. Someone dropped them somewhere, and the chances are they've been shoveled into the furnace with the waste."

Mrs. Holworth and the boys met the situation with more courage than might have been expected. When alone, Steve and Martin found some satisfaction in expressing candid opinions of Henry Gasby in particular and of the Gasby tribe in general; but coming to realize that such rage was worse than useless, they settled down to a calmer state of mind. Meantime all the family awaited the outcome of Mr. Holworth's intention to seek legal advice. Yet this brought little comfort. Watford & Aldervale, one of Glencoburn's best

law firms, could foresee nothing better than a compromise settlement. "Which, as against Henry Gasby, is likely to be poor enough," said Charles Aldervale.

In the known circumstance that Pliny Holworth had suffered a heavy loss and that he was mortgaging his home to pay his men and continue in business, it was something of a six-days' wonder to the gossiping community of Glencoburn that Steve was nevertheless entering State University. It was generally supposed that Steve had received a substantial sum from the Bank of Starling. Grouchy Garlic spread the statement that the bank had divided the returned money equally with the Holworths. Such talk was as silly as it was untrue, and few people guessed on what scanty resources Stephen Holworth set out for the university and the furtherance of his education.

A knowledge of Henry Gasby's petty, grasping character gained at first hand during the summer had prepared Steve in a measure for the blow that came with the flat rejection of the building. After the first rush of anger over the rank injustice done his father, he faced the hard truth calmly. His courage, or "plain spunk" as Martin called it, helped his brother as well as himself. With the facts

before them, all the family talked of Steve's future.

"If one fellow can make his way through school on his own, I can. Plenty have done it. I can't see why I shouldn't," Steve declared.

Mrs. Holworth feared he did not realize the difficulties he must face—that he spoke carelessly.

"I don't mean it that way," Steve answered. "Maybe I don't know what I'm running into. And of course I may not stick it out. I'll not be very dramatic about it until I do; but I'm as serious as a man sitting down on a carbuncle." At which Martin laughed.

Pliny Holworth said he would give Steve his wages, the same as he was paying all other employes of the summer, and the thing was settled.

Going to college under these circumstances, however, was little in keeping with the fancies Steve had cherished. He had meant to have at least two new suits. He had thought a tuxedo, also, would be desirable. He had had in view a good-sized wardrobe trunk, but it remained in the store where twice he had called to look it over. The capacious brown leather bag he had admired and planned to own remained in the same place.

The melancholy truth was that Steve had

no difficulty in getting all his clothes into the well-worn family suitcase. There was an old-time "telescope" affair that his mother would have had him take also, but Steve rebelled. "I might lug grandfather's old carpet-bag along," said he, "but not that thing!" Yet he smiled. And somehow he seemed to find that for most of his cares and vexations a smile was a real remedy. It made him more agreeable within himself. It made others more agreeable toward him.

Steve had dreamed quite pleasantly of saying good-bye to Glencoburn in a sort of hip hurrah and jolly fashion—waving good-bye merrily to Bob Liscomb and others who might gather to see him off. But as it turned out, his leave-taking was unexciting, to say the utmost possible. With a delivery wagon of the Holworth contracting business, Martin took his brother's baggage to the station. Steve walked.

He had had no heart for making farewell calls but, having said his good-bye at home, he went through the Aldervale grounds, hopeful that he might see Elizabeth. He found her with Billy Fee, the gardener, who was cutting a bouquet of asters under her direction.

"Just came this way to say good-bye." Steve spoke cheerily.

"Oh—good-bye," and Elizabeth went on intently arranging her asters in the gay black-and-orange basket in her lap.

This also was quite unlike the leave-taking Steve had fancied. He had known Elizabeth since childhood. In time gone by he had confided to her his dearest aims; and now, he had thought, she might at least show some interest in his departure.

"And good-bye to you, Uncle Billy." His voice was less cheery than before.

"Why, yes, Stephen, you're off to school and good-bye to you! Did seem to me that your father might make a carpenter of you, maybe. I thought likely you'd stay on with him; but there's many a man that can't master a trade! All around we see 'em—pretty poor sticks."

"You're rough on some of us, Uncle Billy," Steve answered with a smile on his lips which found no response within. He called good-bye to Elizabeth again as he turned to go.

She glanced up, nodding indifferently. Yet perhaps she also thought the caustic observations of Billy Fee had been less than fair. Suddenly springing up, she called, "Wait half a minute! For old times' sake, Steve, I am going to pin a rose on you."

This she did in a bright, coquettish way, and in consequence Stephen Holworth walked

on to the station with a lighter heart than he had lately had. He could not have told just why.

Elizabeth returned thoughtfully to the black-and-orange basket and the asters. "The roses have never been so fine as this year, Uncle Billy. Never before so nice in September."

"Not what they should be," he answered grimly. "It's discouragin' to see 'em, poor things."

Bob Liscomb alone was at the station to see Steve off. "Gosh, I wish you had taken that job at the quarries," he said. "On ten a week you could have a bang-up time, and save some money, too," he observed thoughtfully.

"Ten big cart-wheels a week never looked so much like real money as it does right now, Bob," Steve answered. "I'll think of it plenty of times when the grass is gone and there's nothing to eat but snowballs."

"Why, you'll get lumbago or something," Bob grinned. "I'll send you some hay."

"Don't forget it!" Steve smiled. "And good-bye, Bobbie. See you about Christmas time—if the walking's good."

Bob turned back to his father's store in a state more doleful than such bantering conversation would suggest. In his heart he was

sincerely sorry that, since Steve was bound to go on with school, the way should be so difficult. He was sorry Steve could not take his own view of working forward to the future —could not content himself to settle down to comfortable ways and the pleasant life of the home town.

CHAPTER VI

JUD FASSLER

At this time Steve Holworth was nineteen years old. He was of medium height, compact of frame and muscular. His composed and regular features gave his face an expression of thoughtfulness brightened, however, by a look of interest and readiness in his gray eyes. A certain confidence and courage in his manner were highly suggestive of those boyish days when he had declared so firmly that there must be some way of finding the legendary treasure of Philander Plum.

As he entered a day coach of his train, Steve saw Joe Gasby passing back to a parlor car. Joe was of slender figure, slightly stooped. He had thin fair hair and shifty blue eyes. He was jauntily dressed and swung along with some ostentation, a tennis racket in his hand. At the superior age of twenty-one, and considering that their acquaintance was but that of having met in different grades of the Glen-

coburn schools, perhaps it was not surprising that Joseph Gasby completely ignored Stephen Holworth. In any case, the son of the town's richest man gave the son of the town's ordinary citizen no notice whatever. The latter wasted upon Joe Gasby no more than a passing glance.

However—"I do wish that someone from these parts might go along to help make things less new and strange," Steve reflected. For a minute or two such thoughts made this thing he was doing appear as a tremendous undertaking. He was tempted to go back. But instead, and with a brave outward show of confidence, he settled himself comfortably in his seat.

When the late afternoon had slipped away, lost somewhere back of the onward rushing train—back along the way, amid the goldenrod and the asters of farm fields and village gardens—Steve became aware that he was hungry. The car was lighted now. A number of passengers were eating lunch. In the well-worn suitcase at his feet were the sandwiches his mother had prepared for him, but he dreaded bringing them forth, and it was in a hesitant, half-stealthy way that he at last opened the suitcase ever so little and took from it, a bit at a time, the food he wanted.

In these maneuvers Steve especially dreaded to come under the eye of a chap of his own age whom he had noticed a few seats to the rear and across the aisle. His intuition told him that the young man probably had in view the same destination as had he. Presently, as he rose and walked to the water-cooler, Steve saw that he was tall and angular of frame. There was a look of simple honesty in his face, but his light hair and something of a rosebud mouth made him appear "green," Steve thought. Also to Steve's thoughts came the inquiry, might he come to know this chap and, if so, should he like him? He believed he should.

It was past ten o'clock when the train rumbled into the Union Station of the capital. Suitcase in hand, Steve made his way to the general waiting-room and on through it to the smoking-room where a number of men lounged about. Two or three were sleeping in huddled, uncomfortable attitudes. For a moment he considered whether he too might not save the price of a lodging by curling up in a section of the hard benches. He was determined to save every penny possible. But his decision was against the foul air and unknown company of the place. Passing into the street, he saw a sign "Hotel" across the

way. Its dingy, ill-lighted look was uninviting, but it gave promise of being inexpensive, and he climbed a flight of stairs to the office. Timidly he wrote his name on a frowzy register pushed toward him by an elderly, frowzy man behind the desk.

The man showed him to a room. In the crumpled papers upon the floor and remnants of a lunch upon a wash-stand there was evidence of the apartment's earlier occupancy by others. An odor of stale tobacco smoke hung everywhere. The bed looked singularly thin and flat. Side rails of the wooden bedstead rose high above the utmost thickness of the mattress, and the threadbare bedspread was dingy gray and saffron. Stephen Holworth's experience was far too limited, however, for him to recognize the utter inferiority of the place. To the contrary it was with a feeling of high satisfaction, a sense of having come all in a few hours to man's estate, that he prepared for bed. So does heaven temper the wind to the fledgling, as well as to the shorn lamb.

On the day that followed, Holworth duly presented himself, bulging suitcase and all, at the registrar's desk at State University. The ordeal was less trying and was over far more quickly than he had anticipated. This made

for a feeling of self-confidence and he was presently studying with a critical eye a list of the approved boarding and rooming houses.

"Excuse me—but say, do you know anything about these places?" The question came from someone near him and, turning, Steve confronted the young gentleman of the blond hair and the girlish mouth whom he had noticed on the train.

"Just about nothing—and a minus sign," Steve answered, and his eyes returned the smile that met his own. Responding to this friendly countersign, he asked, "Looking for a room, or board and room?"

"I kind of expect to rustle for my meals," the other said with a hesitant laugh, and Steve saw in his frank, good-humored face the same problems of economy which he himself must meet.

"Here's a Mrs. McQuiggan with room, only, for two—1200 Elm Street. That isn't far, is it?" the first speaker continued. "How does a man go about hooking up with a roommate? You don't happen to be going it alone, do you?"

"I'm about as ignorant as a man can be," Steve confessed, "and yes, I'm alone. What do you say that we have a look at Lady McQuiggan's ranch?"

And such was the beginning of an acquaintance which ripened into friendship as the days went by. Walking on together, Steve discovered his companion's name to be Judson—usually, just plain Jud—Fassler. His home was at Grayling, a small town midway between the capital and Glencoburn, where his father kept a general store. Jud was talkative.

"I'm not so sure I can bust in," said he, referring to credits and examinations necessary to matriculation, "but I hope I can—at least for a year or two. College gives a kind of polish that it's nice to have; and it would help me in the store if I should finally hook up there. I haven't made up my mind what I'm going to do; have you?"

The simple, frank way in which Jud talked of himself made it very easy to become well acquainted with him, and Steve liked him at once. Still, he thought it unwise to talk so freely on first acquaintance, and he answered Jud's direct questions as briefly as he decently could. He did say frankly, as the subject was mentioned again, that he was "on his own" and that if he got through his tests in good order he intended "plugging right into it" to make an engineer of himself.

Twelve hundred Elm Street proved to be a

dwelling erected in that period when such structures were built up to the line of the street. The house was well preserved and had a look of threadbare respectability. Its square, box-like proportions rose two full stories above the sidewalk. Stained glass panels beside the street door, and closely shuttered windows lent an air of seclusion and even mystery to the place, and the street itself was hushed and quiet.

Mrs. McQuiggan was a woman of sixty or thereabout. Her thin, gray hair was combed back severely, accentuating her sharp, refined features. She was very desirous of letting the one room she had to spare, and Steve and Jud were soon inspecting the apartment.

The room offered them was on the second floor and faced the street. It was large, and comfortably though plainly furnished. The walls were dingy in a worn brown paper, but good light came from the high windows as the shades were raised and shutters thrown open. There was a small, open stove for heating the apartment. With visions of steaks broiling over the open blaze, Steve ventured the opinion that the heating arrangement would be satisfactory.

A few steps down the hall was a bathroom. There were the usual conveniences but the

tub itself was a hopeless affair of zinc set into a wooden frame. To use his own term for it, Steve was on the verge of having "cold feet" as he saw this tub, but Jud said promptly, "All to the good!" And upon Mrs. McQuiggan saying the rate for the two would be only four dollars per week, light and fuel furnished, he glanced at Steve. With some misgiving, the latter nodded, and Jud Fassler's ready tongue rattled on, "All to the good, and we'll move in right off!"

CHAPTER VII

THE UPGRADE

Jud Fassler followed Steve's lead in making prompt application for any situation available as a help toward earning one's way. Both found work assuring them their meals. Steve thought Jud was highly fortunate, for he was given a place as waiter in the private dining-room of the Faculty Club. This provided an opportunity to know and be known by most of the instructors, even to Coach Winger and Prexy Joseph Tuckerman himself—"Old Josephus," as the rank and file were wont to style the popular president.

Steve's work was in the lower social scale of the Eagle Cafeteria, a large restaurant much frequented by the student body and yet quite superior to most of the beaneries. On the whole, he felt himself fortunate. In white coat, cap and apron, behind the desserts counter, he had excellent opportunity to note the individual traits, whims and fancies of many

students he would otherwise not have known. Outside their room, Steve and Jud saw little of each other, yet they met at night quite as old friends.

One evening early in their acquaintance, Steve returned to their apartment to find it empty. This was unusual, for Jud's work rarely kept him late. Nevertheless, Steve kicked off his oxfords and, drawing up a chair, cushioned his feet upon the bed and opened a text book of Spanish. Things had been breaking very well with him, as he would have said. He was confident now that, though the margin might be slender, he would "make the grade" for the engineering course. He already saw that physics and chemistry would interest him greatly. In way of language, he had chosen Spanish as likely to be useful and, following Latin, not really difficult. Now he settled back comfortably to look into the book.

It was after eleven when Jud came in. "Hello, old pal," said he, cheerily. "Look what the Candy Kid brought you!" and from the folds of a newspaper tucked within his shirt Fassler produced half of an apple pie. "Fall to!" he grinned, spreading down the newspaper and putting the pie upon it.

Steve was not at all sure Jud had not been indulging in more than pastry, but with his

pocket knife he divided the plunder equally. "Sure, it's good," he said, liberally experimenting. "What bush does it grow on?"

"Aw, some of the faculty sat over a table tonight as if they would stay till the cows came home. Two of us had to stick around. I got a chance to slide a whole pie in back of the garbage can outside. I gave the other half to Priscilla—he's the guy I'm paired with on the dead man's watch, as we call it. Priscilla's other name is Prime—Hector Prime! And he looks like a girl—a green one. Oh, Hector! Can you beat it?"

Jud had shown a disposition to be overtalkative so many other times that Steve was prepared for his rattling on in such fashion though, personally, he was more interested at this moment in trying to find how much his knowledge of Latin might help him with Spanish. At last, however, he was obliged to put down his book. Jud would not be quiet.

"This man's college," he was saying, "is the funniest thing you could think of in a month. It is their announced purpose in life to put men through their mill and so help them to knowledge, understanding and great usefulness in the world. The joke is in the way they go about it. Instead of reaching out a hand to help a man into their craft, what do they

do? They lam him over the head with an oar! They kick him in the slats. If he gets a hand on the gunwale and seems likely to climb in, they knock his fingers out of joint with a pipe wrench. They soak him in the eye with a wet mop!"

"What's the mighty grievance?" Steve smiled, though he knew from earlier remarks that Jud was in some doubt as to his admission.

"All grievance—nothing else! I make a bid for a liberal arts course. Someone asks me, in effect, what's the big idea? Seems they think I might rather go over to the Agricultural College. They seem to doubt if I can get in, even there. They want to know what do I aim to do, or be, make of myself, and how do I know? I figure it out and get an answer; but I figure again to prove it, and the thing's all wrong. And what can a man do?"

"Why, make up your mind," Steve laughed. "You've a great flow of language; why not try journalism?"

"Nothin' doin'! I've thought of that. I wish I had a million dollars!"

Still talking, Jud prepared for bed. Steve followed a little later and as he fell asleep he was still wondering just why Jud had come to State.

As Jud had feared, his definite placement was in abeyance long after Steve was well launched upon the course he wished. With all his impetuous, boyish nature Fassler congratulated his roommate, but as to his own affairs he jocosely lamented, or he volubly scolded everyone but himself. He was likable and bright and had little difficulty with lessons; but Steve decided Jud's mind and habits, like his tongue, were in need of discipline. He could not or would not stir in the morning until his friend had literally dragged him out of bed; but if Steve went off failing to get him up, poor Jud vowed it was a hard world with never a hand put out to help him.

Meantime it had developed that Jud was but nominally on his own resources. He received frequent small sums from his mother and made no effort to seek other employment than that by which he got his meals. On the other hand, poor Steve was soon working early and late. Having tried in vain to get a spare-time position in one of the larger stores, he took the next best thing and every Saturday tucked up his sleeves to wait on a small grocer's customers and even to mow the grocer's lawn and wash the grocer's wagon.

And yet Holworth found time for recreation, too. He was much attracted by a par-

ticular star among the Freshmen, George W. or G. W.—otherwise "Gee Whiz"—Galliard. He was a clever chap and had early gained far more recognition than a Frosh may reasonably expect. He was on the staff of "Just So," the college paper, and active in a variety of extra-curricula matters, including the glee club and theatricals. He was taking journalism and Steve met him in both English and Spanish classes. Early acquaintance grew into friendship and though Galliard often railed at Steve for being a "digger," if the latter laughingly refused his invitations to one "lay" or another, he was nevertheless quite certain to look up Steve Holworth whenever he felt like talking of more serious things.

Meeting Gee Whiz through Steve, Jud Fassler was much attracted by Galliard's winning personality and airy ways. It was evident, too, that Galliard liked admiration and he found in Jud a companion he often "took under his wing." Indeed, Steve declared, Gee Whiz had only to crook a finger and Jud was instantly on the spot. Jud never resented the implied criticism and, for that matter, resentment was fairly foreign to his nature; but he came to laugh uneasily when Steve good-naturedly charged him with going

a pace he could not afford. "On the level, Judy,"—a pet name he had come to use—"on the level, you can't travel with a man who spends money as Galliard does. You've got to have the wherewithal or bum it, and then you just naturally get a rep that puts you out of the picture."

"Right-o!" Jud admitted. For a few minutes his girlish mouth drooped at the corners. Then—"Darn it," he would say, "I'm going to turn over a new leaf. How much do I owe? Sam Hill! I owe the Dutchman something, and I owe Tony for haircuts and shaves, and I owe Priscilla six bucks, and—I wish I had a million dollars!"

* * * * * *

And meantime the little world of Glencoburn was awake when it was not asleep and except for the excitement of seeing an occasional new automobile in town—for this was the period when motor cars were just coming into general use—there was "nothing to talk about but the weather." Or so, at least, Bob Liscomb wrote to Steve.

Red Kaggy had recovered and was duly removed to the jail at Vernon, the capital of the adjoining county, in which the bank robbery occurred. Letters from home had given Steve this news and they also informed

him that, when arraigned, Red's plea had been "not guilty". The newspapers had carried the information that none of the three who saw the bandit in the Bank of Starling had definitely identified Kaggy as the "female" robber. As one of the news writers had pointed out, the man's conviction would depend upon the testimony of the one who had come upon him wounded and with the loot at his side, namely, Stephen Holworth.

From his mother's letters and an occasional lengthy scrawl from his brother Martin, Steve knew that Henry Gasby had flatly refused to compromise the trouble over the building erected for him. Martin wrote that he could not say what he really thought on any but asbestos paper. In general, however, he avoided the topic. Automobiles were his favorite subject and he knew the horsepower and practically everything else concerning every car in town. With great gusto and in a curious mixture of admiration and regret, he filled a four-page letter in telling Steve how Mr. Watford (of the Watford & Aldervale law firm) had mown down four courthouse hitching posts before he got his car stopped and then, backing up suddenly, and much to the delight of all witnesses, he had mown down two more.

Steve had received one brief letter from Elizabeth Aldervale. He had written her of his final matriculation as a full-fledged Freshman and again of his progress and friendships. But he had also learned that Elizabeth was now away at an eastern school and he thought it little strange that she wrote him but once. Nevertheless, he found himself certain to compare the few girls he met with the one he had known from his earliest years. "As if there were but one known quantity," he once said to himself, "and all others were x, y or z." Yet the subject was like the trial of Red Kaggy, he concluded: the less thought about, the better.

Jud Fassler was coming to be a source of more immediate concern. This was especially true as Jud himself began to realize that his first semester would possibly be his last. To Steve he told his troubles freely. Indeed, he appeared as willing to talk of his trials and tribulations as anything else. At least this was true in his talks with Steve. Earnestly at first, then in despair, the latter sought to advise and condole with him. But as often as Jud resolved to apply himself, to stop going to the Dutchman's and to pay his debts, just that often, also, Steve would find him a day later gay and careless, planning how he was

to manage finances and the like for the very dates he had promised to cancel. Then: "Stick by me, old topper! Without you I'm licked!" he would say whimsically. "Even Gee Whiz Galliard reads me the riot act! Think of it! He tells me to take a brace! I wish I had a million dollars!"

The subpoena as a witness for the state in the trial of Red Kaggy came, of course, when least expected. A deputy sheriff was awaiting Steve as he returned one evening to Elm Street. The trial was to begin the second day thereafter; and although the prosecuting attorney had at an earlier time taken Steve's deposition for use before the Grand Jury, he now asked that Holworth meet him at his office at once. There was nothing for it but to accompany the deputy. Still, it was exciting and a real adventure, even though an unpleasant one as the train for Vernon thundered away through the night.

CHAPTER VIII

A BITER BITTEN

Throughout Vernon and adjacent towns, especially Glencoburn and Starling, there was keen interest in the trial of Red Kaggy. Though the evidence against him may have appeared to leave little question as to the outcome, there was doubt in the minds of many. The state's attorneys had failed entirely to find where, if at all, Kaggy had obtained the feminine apparel he was alleged to have worn. The Starling Bank people identified these garments—the hat and coat—but they did not definitely identify the accused man.

Kaggy asserted boldly that he came by the bank's money and the woman's clothing by reason of having followed a stranger who alighted from an automobile in the Lower Town of Glencoburn. In a manner to excite suspicion, the stranger took to the path leading to Plum's Pastures. This, Kaggy said, was the evening prior to his being found by Steve Holworth. He had come upon the

unknown man as the latter was looking for a place to conceal his plunder. There had been a fight. Unaware that he had wounded Kaggy, the stranger had dropped his loot and fled.

Kaggy's story was in part substantiated by Nick Delanti. The latter also claimed to have seen the stranger, whose suspicious actions had later attracted Kaggy's notice.

On the other hand, the state's attorneys made a great deal of Steve Holworth's testimony, especially emphasizing Kaggy's offer to divide the stolen money in return for secrecy. With Holworth on the witness stand, they sought to show that Red had made ugly threats as to what he would do if protection were not given him. Here, however, the testimony was not all that they desired. From the first, Steve had made light of Kaggy's promised vengeance. He had told none but intimate friends the story of the man's vow to send him to his death in the depths of Hell Yawns. His main reason for silence was that such a statement would greatly alarm his mother. Further, as he considered the threats to have been made in anger, he saw no reason why he should make matters worse for Kaggy than he was obliged to do.

Yet the effect of Steve's testimony at this point took a turn he had not thought of. As he testified the prisoner had made no threats which he regarded seriously, he observed that Kaggy took this as belittling himself and the reprisal he had promised. A glance from the man's eyes said plainly, "Don't fool yourself that there's nothing to be taken seriously!"

The trial dragged through two days, but the verdict was "Guilty, as charged". There were not a few who declared it unjust—that Kaggy was a victim of circumstantial evidence. Nevertheless, in due time Kaggy was taken to the penitentiary to serve an indeterminate sentence. Steve Holworth allowed himself to be quite miserable over it all. But he was glad of one thing: the Starling Bank people had not so much as hinted their wish to pay any sort of reward. He had met all these men during the trial, and they had expressed again their appreciation of his services. That was all.

* * * * * *

"Now, if you're looking for a place to bestow some first-rate sympathy, take me as a worthy object," grinned Jud Fassler, coming to the Elm Street apartment at about this time and finding Steve in drooping spirits. "For I'm sorry to say, my boy, they're going

to try to run their college without yours truly."

Holworth was too frankly honest to pretend much surprise. For a long time it had been evident that with the end of the first semester Fassler would either be all through or placed wholly in preparatory work. A score of times the two had discussed such a probability, and always Jud had said: "What is to be, is to be, and that's that!"

Jud did not return to State after the Christmas holidays; and though Steve still liked him and missed him, he found his own work going more smoothly, and his time filled to better advantage in the absence of Fassler's jovial chatter. He saw more of Gee Whiz Galliard than formerly and the latter, being himself on probation, was now taking a steadier pace than that which had earlier made him a merry figure on the campus. He declared he would move into the Elm Street room with Steve; but after a second look at the zinc bathtub, he said: "Stephen, you drive me wild! You cast such a halo of quality on this dump that a man doesn't see how fierce it is. You're not such a moth-eaten bookworm but what I like you, and I'll tell you what! We're going to have a nice little coop together, though not in this hennery!"

However, it was not until much later that the little coop together became a reality, and meantime many things happened.

First of importance was a letter from Jud Fassler enclosing transportation and urging Steve to spend the week-end with him at his home in Grayling. Holworth accepted the invitation. He found the visit a pleasant one, and the more so as it developed that Jud's father and mother had, in fact, called him into council concerning their son and heir.

Steve had not a doubt that Jud had greatly overstated his feeble qualifications for such a task, but he set about the job of helping Jud find himself. The facts were that the young man wanted a place in his father's store, but he did not want to stand around just to wait on trade. He said that if given a real job, such as selling plows to farmers who needed them but who postponed buying—a job for a real salesman, he'd be interested and would work. And the upshot of it was that the elder Fassler declared he would take the agency for a popular automobile, put in a line of tires and automobile accessories also, and let Jud handle that department of the business. Having endorsed this plan, Steve severely cautioned his enthusiastic friend that he must not let it fail; and Jud assured him he had

found his work and meant to dwell with it evermore.

In the early spring of Steve's first year at State, there came another development immediately affecting his present and future interests. This had to do with the old trouble and losses in connection with Henry Gasby's rejection of the building erected for him. Still hoping to arrive at some compromise, saving all parties the expense of a lawsuit, Charles Aldervale had taken no positive step toward court procedure against Mr. Gasby. Now, however, Mr. Gasby was saying flatly that the rejected building must be removed forthwith, as he intended erecting such a structure as he "should have had in the first place."

Mr. Aldervale had not been idle with reference to the controversy and fortunately he was able to say to Mr. Gasby, with a smile, that he would so advise his client. The next day, in fact, he sent for Pliny Holworth. They had a half-hour conference and the result was that next morning Mr. Holworth and some of his men began the razing of the building. The work continued vigorously. Many times Henry Gasby approached to look on. His face was expressive of glum satisfaction, yet he would walk nervously away, only to return. Always he eyed the busy

workmen removing windows and ironwork, and saving all materials carefully.

"I'm glad you mean business," he said to Charles Aldervale, as the latter was passing.

"We will even fill in the excavation, Henry, —leave your lot just as we found it." Mr. Aldervale smiled.

"Just as you please! You spite yourselves, not me, if you go to the cost of filling in the cellar. I'm not requiring that. I'll save Holworth that expense, if he wishes it; but I shall allow nothing for the original digging."

It was at this time that Jackson Lorry, a real estate man of Starling, came to Glencoburn looking for business frontage. Among others, he called on Henry Gasby, inquiring the price of the lot from which the new building was being removed. Henry Gasby was convinced that, in starting the removal of the structure, Charles Aldervale and Pliny Holworth were but trying to incite him to make an offer for the building as it stood. Their announced determination to restore the lot to its original condition fully persuaded him that such was their plan. As a matter of fact, he had intended making an offer at precisely the right moment; but now he saw a better move. If he could sell the lot for enough money, he would certainly pursue his

present course to the limit—the last splinter of the building must be taken from the premises.

Nevertheless, Henry Gasby moved slowly and he moved with characteristic stealth. He made quiet inquiries. He heard of Jackson Lorry looking over other properties. As nearly as he could find out, Starling interests had in view building a first-class hotel in Glencoburn. Late on the same day, Mr. Lorry called again to see him. "I can buy other property that suits me very well, but if you want to take ten thousand dollars for your frontage, minus the building, I'll close the deal at once. If not, your lot is out of consideration."

Mr. Gasby was evasive. Mr. Lorry started to go. Mr. Gasby said, "What are you prepared to pay on the spot?" And the outcome was that he accepted twenty crisp hundred-dollar bills and signed an agreement selling the lot and placing the property in escrow pending the preparation of final papers and the payment of the balance.

Vastly to the surprise of Mr. Gasby, the one workman at the building on the day following appeared to have little to do. Mr. Gasby remonstrated. He called Mr. Aldervale to protest, advising the lawyer that the lot was

sold and that the removal of all material Pliny Holworth meant to save must be finished at once. Later in the day, as Mr. Gasby's lean, stooped figure went down the creaking wooden stairs leading from his office to the street, all in his own stealthy, creaking way, he saw to his surprise that a wagon had driven up to the windowless new building and that sash and glass so lately hauled away were being restored to place. He did not know exactly what it all meant but he was suspicious, and he muttered: "Aldervale is a low-lived shyster!"

As a matter of fact, he was quite wrong as to the character of Mr. Aldervale. If the latter had resorted to sharp tactics, it was only because sharp tactics were the invariable method of the man with whom he had to deal. The truth as to what had happened was simplicity itself. Frank Fenlow had sold his livery stable and proposed to go into the automobile business. He asked Charles Aldervale to help him organize his company and to take a few shares of stock.

At substantially the same time Mr. Aldervale was approached by Jackson Lorry of Starling, with reference to the purchase of the Gasby lot and the building Pliny Holworth had erected thereon. As a result of the talk

with Lorry he proposed to Pliny Holworth that partial ownership of the building, which might be leased at once to Mr. Fenlow, would be a good investment. Then the two conspired to induce Mr. Gasby to sell the property at a fair price. Just how and why Starling interests had planned and proposed to share this investment in Glencoburn, Mr. Aldervale told no one. Jacob Watford, his partner, shared in the enterprise and he knew the source of the money which financed the deal, but he was close-mouthed; and even Pliny Holworth told his family to ask no questions. Except for retaining a partial interest in the property, he had received cash for the building he had erected, and all in a proper and business-like way.

As developments proceeded and Henry Gasby saw the rejected structure readily converted into display and salesrooms for an automobile business and leased at a fair figure, he declared again that Charles Aldervale was a shyster, and that he and no one else had engineered a plain steal—for that was what Mr. Gasby called it. Yet it did appear that everyone but Mr. Gasby was pleased with the outcome of the original controversy.

Marked improvement in Pliny Holworth's financial situation came as an immediate help

to Steve at State University. His father wrote interestingly of the way in which Mr. Aldervale had handled the matter, and Steve had not a doubt that Watford and Aldervale, both good lawyers and well-to-do, had financed the undertaking. In his heart he thanked them earnestly.

In any case, there was ground for jollification both for the bettered family fortunes and the accompanying circumstance that he would hereafter have a bit of help from home, as he continued in college. So he called Gee Whiz Galliard. "I am going to take you," he said, "to the best feed this village can set forth. You name the place." Thus, far more brightly than it began, Steve's first year at State drew on to a close. Definitely now, he and Galliard resolved to find for themselves a very snug nest for the year to come.

"Because," said Gee Whiz in his semi-serious way, "I need you, my boy. The bright reflection of your halo of scholarship and morality helps keep me to the mark. And you need me because otherwise that noble brow will be furrowed by too much thought. Together we are invincible; and though—

" ' 'Tis not in mortals to command success, we'll do more,
Sempronius, we'll deserve it!' "

Occasionally Steve received letters from Grayling. Jud Fassler was doing well with his automobile business. In May he urged Steve to stop off for a visit, and the latter did so. Out of this meeting there came to Steve an idea that in the field of manufacturing automobiles and their accessories he might find a future market for his services. Jud Fassler suggested that tire manufacturers were hardly second in importance to the builders of cars complete, and proposed to send Steve some of the printed matter of the tire factories.

"Glad to have you do it," Steve declared and, as the long vacation was at hand, he at once decided to make automobile and rubber subjects an informal course of study for the summer.

CHAPTER IX

LIFE'S DARKEST HOUR

Upon returning home, it struck Steve Holworth as strangely curious that he found everything in Glencoburn and among his friends so wholly unchanged. People were doing just the things they had always done. Bob Liscomb was still behind the soda counter at the drug store. Uncle Billy Fee was at work about the Aldervale home and the garden, as he had been for years. The same tow-headed urchin brought the daily paper each evening. Candy Krick, the fish peddler, tooted his horn from his rickety two-wheeled cart, slapped his horse with the reins and cut corners on one wheel exactly as he had done from Steve's earliest remembrance.

After a few days' rest and idleness, Steve went to work at such things as he could do in his father's building operations. Slowly he awoke to the consciousness that changes he had looked to find in Glencoburn were

really in himself. If he suffered a moderate attack of self-inflation, however—which is possible—it was no more than has befallen the majority of young men at one time and another. Still, he kept disparaging views of the town locked in his own thoughts. It was not always easy. For instance, Bob Liscomb pointed out that the chap who had taken the storekeeper job at the quarries was now "drawing down his sixty per month."

"Good for him!" said Steve cheerily. "For I'll tell you, Bob," he added thoughtfully, "it is in getting up the grades that an automobile shows what power it has, and that's what I'm working for—more power."

"You'll find the power, Steve! Yet a lot depends on how you look at it. Mine is the way that comes the easiest; and it works. Wait till you see my new Ford!"

Thus there were days when Steve was in doubt. He faced a grim uncertainty. Life in Glencoburn offered many attractions. Maybe Bob Liscomb was right. And it was not only during this first long vacation, but also in later time that Steve often pondered upon such subjects. He felt himself groping for an unknown place. But he always came back to the same resolution: to keep working forward, let the ultimate goal be what it might.

Steve's second year at State passed quickly. It was much easier than the first and, like many a Sophomore, he sometimes wondered if ever he had been as "fresh" as some of these Freshmen now about him. A limited but regular sum from home made it unnecessary that he give so much time to money-earning jobs. Instead of the work at the grocery, he now tutored a young Norwegian who, while working at the Capital Creamery, was fitting himself for college. He donned a waiter's apron at the Faculty Club instead of at the cafeteria. This was very different and much better.

Life with Gee Whiz Galliard rarely sank to a dull daily routine and time and again Steve found himself dragged off to dates he could not afford, either as to money or time. Many a morning he sleepily crawled out for chapel while Galliard still slumbered.

"You're a hero, but a poor fish at that!" the latter growled sleepily.

"You speak the miserable truth," Holworth muttered wearily, "but we enlisted for this man's war and we're going into battle if it kills us—Come on!" And still protesting, Gee Whiz obeyed orders.

One outcome of such good-humored conflicts was a covenant proposed by Galliard to

which both solemnly agreed. From time to time Gee Whiz made up a list of his prospective dates. Steve made up a list of his own few intended engagements but more particularly a statement of the extra work and reading he was planning.

Each was allowed to censor the other's list. For instance, pencil in hand, Galliard pored over Holworth's proposed schedule, "Thinking of going over some lab experiments you've already had? It's for no good! I cut that out. No man can work all the time; and, besides, it's foolish!"

Similarly Steve ran through the list Gee Whiz put before him. "Oh! 'Have in view going to the Colonial Wednesday night—think of asking our blonde friend!' She's a nice girl; but it won't do. A thing done twice in succession is on the way to becoming a habit. And I see! A little stag at the Dutchman's Saturday night! No, no! You remember the last one? It's not for you again so soon, and I chalk that out."

It would be but a dull recital to make report at length concerning Holworth's serious college work. He had some extra-curricula matters, but chiefly he was a student; not one of remarkable brilliance, but a thinker and seriously devoted to getting the education

he was paying for, and which old Billy Fee had predicted he would not get in any remarkable measure. There was play as well as work, however, and upon this George W. Galliard strenuously insisted. Some days dragged, but they were the exception and each semester seemed hardly more than well under way before one must reckon with its close and the starting of another.

There was an incident of Steve's experiences in earning money which caused him more confusion and heartache, which injured his vanity more and which remained longer as a sore spot in his memory than any other incident of his college years. Together with several others, glad of a chance to earn extra money, Steve improved an opportunity to serve as a waiter at a large social function and dinner given by Mr. Seward, a local bank executive, at the close of a district convention of bank officers and directors. The affair took place at Mr. Seward's country home—a large, old house erected in those days when floors of uniform level were more the exception than the rule.

The student waiters were cautioned that, as they passed from the kitchen to the dining-room, and thence to the adjoining living-room which had been opened to accommodate a

long table extending through both apartments, they must remember that the living-room floor was one step down. All made note of the fact.

With much interest Steve found Mr. and Mrs. Charles Aldervale and Henry Gasby of Glencoburn among the others at the great table. With a sensation as of nervous shock, a moment later he saw Elizabeth Aldervale and Joe Gasby among a group of younger people. For the latter he cared little enough. They had never come to more than a speaking acquaintance. But it did hurt that Elizabeth was with the fellow, and that she was to see a better friend in his waiter's uniform. He covered the situation by a sober pretense of seeing no one; but Miss Aldervale was determined that Steve should not be allowed to appear unaware of her presence. She touched his arm as he was passing and greeted him pleasantly. "Father brought me to his convention, but this is the first pleasure I have had in it. To meet both Joe and you makes it quite worth while."

Steve was aware of replying awkwardly, though he scarcely knew what he said. Joe Gasby's cool, superior smile was maddening; but worse was to come.

Entering with a heavy tray as salad was

served and the student waiters, in single file, were passing rapidly each to his section of the long table, Steve forgot the step down to the floor of the living-room. He crashed violently. As he pitched headlong, his tray flew from his hands. Eight portions of salad and eight salad plates were precipitated in all directions. The crash of breaking glass added to the clatter and contributed to the confusion which the gay assemblage could but partially repress.

Adding to Steve's unspeakable chagrin, Elizabeth Aldervale and Joe Gasby were among the first of those who reached him to lift him up. He would have given the world to have died instantly. Though Mr. and Mrs. Seward, Elizabeth and others immediately characterized the accident as quite to be expected, due to the changing level of the floors, poor Steve was fairly crushed. The impulse seized him to board the next train for the west and to lose himself in distant places to his dying day.

Gee Whiz Galliard helped pull his most devoted friend from the depths of despondency which followed the unfortunate incident, and Jud Fassler, coming to spend an afternoon and night with the two at about this time, cheerfully proposed that he would "take a

punch at Joe Gasby's head" at the earliest opportunity. Together Jud and Galliard were so disposed to laugh the matter off that Steve agreed to forget it.

As the time came when he could look forward to the closing year of school, he busied himself mightily. He had definitely decided to make rubber a first choice as to a field of future endeavors, and in the laboratory and elsewhere he worked and read in that direction.

Holding firmly to this idea as the last semester of his course came on, Steve sent inquiries for employment to each of the three large rubber manufacturers in Colfax, a city of some importance and, roughly, within a hundred miles of Glencoburn. From each he received, in course of time, a blank application form which he was asked to fill out and return for reference, should the occasion present itself. This he did, but to his great disappointment he received no further communications.

Commencement week came—a gay and busy time. Holworth's general standing was creditable, but he was no such prominent figure as Gee Whiz Galliard, whose extra-curricula activities had made him conspicuous in both Junior and Senior years. Steve was

proud of him—proud of their warm friendship, and he could have wept tears, had he dared, when George led him to his mother, presenting him with the declaration, "This is the man who has been my pilot. But for Steve, I'd have been kicked out long ago."

The night of the president's reception, Steve learned from one and another that Galliard was inquiring for him everywhere. Going in search, he found Gee Whiz surrounded, as always, by a group of admirers, but Galliard immediately rushed upon him. "There's a telegram for you at the house," he said. "Hope nothing's wrong, but telegrams make me fidgety. I'm going to walk over with you."

There was nothing wrong. The message read:

> "Please call for interview at earliest opportunity.
>
> "Oldham Rubber Company."

And thus it was that before the hard-earned diploma was so much as framed, Steve Holworth's name was on a factory payroll at sixty dollars per month. And, as Bob Liscomb had once said, he still had to work up.

Also the visions of a neat office, important mail and the like, such as Steve had once entertained, were effectually eliminated. The

process was quick, though not entirely without pain—at least a pang of disappointment. As nearly as he could describe his work, he was a yard foreman, reporting directly to Reuben Woolford, general superintendent. He had no desk. No mail was referred to him.

"There will be plenty of work here, and every chance in the world to learn the rubber business, if you make a go of it," Mr. Woolford had said. "Right now, I want a man who can hear a few simple orders, then do what's to be done. The employment office will give you five or six men for plain labor, whenever needed. You are to be the brains of that gang—to such extent as they have any. It means factory hours, not office hours; and as a matter of course, you will have a clock card."

"Yes, sir," said Steve Holworth attentively; but his inner thoughts were telling him that this certainly was not the job he had pictured. On the other hand, the Oldham Works were widely known as being well managed and thorough. Training here would be a real asset.

Within a few hours Steve Holworth was at work and five pairs of brawny arms and five pairs of broad and husky shoulders were at

his bidding. This might be the moving of a pile of cinders, the erection of a plank retaining wall to support an enormous pile of coal along the railway switch, or other such work. But—"You are to be the brains of the gang," was in Steve's mind constantly, and always he was interpreting the words as fitted the occasion. He saw them to mean, for instance, that, when the removal of the cinders proved likely to send gritty dust into open windows of the millroom, a hose was brought. The cinders were liberally sprinkled and so handled in a cleanly manner.

He remembered that in working with his father's employes, the boss who accomplished the most was the one who knew his men best. He knew that men liked to be recognized as men—not looked upon as but part of a machine. So he called each one of his crew by name. As thus: "Andy, stow that hose—reel it up as we found it. John, you and Pete put those wheelbarrows away. Tony, bring a spade. Come on then, everybody,—you with me, Gus, we'll straighten up the fence where the cinder pile pushed it out of plumb." And so the work went from day to day.

The pungent odor of rubber was everywhere present about the great factory and its surroundings. At first Steve found it dis-

agreeable, but within a few weeks he came to like the atmosphere thus flavored. If it saturated his clothing, as it often did, he little cared. Like the gray of the soapstone he encountered everywhere and which put its dusty traces upon him a hundred times a day, the rubber odor was a badge of merit, marking one as being engaged in a great and useful part of the world's work.

The nutty, smoky odor of all the finer grades of crude rubber came to be as delightful as the scent of rare spices. Even the heavy odors of the millrooms, a curious mixture of the pleasant, the vile and more vile, as rubbers of different kinds were blended with sulphur and other compounding ingredients between great heated cylinders—these were but the signs of a mighty business. Here were secrets and deep mysteries—the processes by which the products of the jungle were tamed and made to serve the needs of civilization in countless ways.

A long and honorable record lay back of the Oldham Rubber Works. Its products fairly covered the field of mechanical rubber goods, such as belting, packing, hose and the like. The company had been a real factor in the development of automobile tires, a division which now quite overshadowed the older

but substantial departments devoted to carriage and bicycle tires, fire department equipment, railroad equipment and similar specialties. The Oldham name was widely recognized as indicative of quality and honorable business methods.

As time went on and Steve gained in knowledge and experience, however, even he sensed a danger that the Oldham Company placed too much reliance upon its good record of the past. The Great Western and National, two newer rubber factories of Colfax, were young and aggressive. They too were growing rapidly and from time to time Steve pondered whether he might not have done better had it chanced that his work lay with one or the other of these brisk, quick-moving organizations. And when at a meeting of the Engineers' Society of Colfax he met Mr. Clarence Ware, vice president and works manager of the Great Western Company, he was more than a little tempted to reshape his course and cast his lot with Mr. Ware's organization. For the gentleman had been not only very agreeable but, in a manner of confidence, said to him: "If you contemplate a change sometime now or later, drop in and have a talk with us."

To this Steve replied, smiling, "For all I

know at this time, I shall be with Oldham indefinitely; but I appreciate your kindness and shall remember it."

This implied invitation, coming from a man of Mr. Ware's unquestioned high position in the rubber industry, put Steve's thoughts aglow. Even after reaching home a nervous excitement continued. He was wakeful and restless. He hardly knew why, yet his thoughts were troubled, though not unpleasantly so.

A day or two of reflection brought Holworth out of the mild flurry Mr. Ware had inspired. Still, it was like passing by a picture he would much like to see, as he denied himself the chance of having at least one look within the door which had been opened to him. It was in such a state of mind that he approached Reub Woolford at the Oldham Works with an inquiring smile.

"I happened to meet Mr. Clarence Ware at the engineers' meeting the other evening. He intimated that I might find a job with Great Western, in case I should be looking for one."

"Yeah, they've taken our help right along. We fire 'em—they hire 'em." And the general superintendent of the Oldham Works wore a look scarcely less caustic than his words.

"But you'll have to admit they're a nice lot of people," Steve remarked in friendly spirit.

"Just a bunch of two-by-fours," said Woolford laconically. "All they know about rubber is what they find out by watching Oldham and by dissecting Oldham products—tires, hose—in short, everything they try to produce."

"Nevertheless, my point is that they're growing and they have a pretty good line of business. They knock off some contracts that are not to be sneezed at—some that we wouldn't mind having."

"But when they blow, they'll go higher than the late Mr. Gilroy's kite. Just wait!"

"I want to make it clear that it is my intention to stay with Oldham—unless I'm fired," Steve replied. "But we're going to make a great mistake if we rest in the belief that Great Western isn't on the map. As you say—'just wait'."

"You let that crowd alone!" Reub Woolford shot back severely. "And as for yourself, remember that if no one else wanted you, we certainly wouldn't have you around."

CHAPTER X

THE OLDHAM RUBBER WORKS

Over a long time it had inwardly hurt Steve to think of himself as but an insignificant member of the Oldham organization. He easily came to know the principal men about him, but apparently they were hardly conscious of his existence. Gradually he became acquainted with department managers and their assistants. About the tables of the company cafeteria, he had come to know others of the engineering forces. So by degrees he was conscious of being at last a part of this great industrial machine.

One day Steve and his crew were summoned to carry up to the office of Henry Oldham, president of the Oldham Company, a complete outfit of new furniture and to remove to the general superintendent's office that which was replaced. Steve saw to it that the new desk, tables and chairs were neatly cleaned, and properly set in their places in readiness for

use. The work was just finished as President Oldham entered the office. He was a tall, scholarly appearing man, gray and dignified. He nodded to Steve approvingly as he saw everything in order and, signaling his men to go, Holworth was following them.

"Just a minute, please," said Mr. Oldham.

"Yes, sir," and Steve turned inquiringly.

"I want to see whether these drawers are working properly, before you get away from me," the president continued blandly. He sat down. "U-um-h! The chair doesn't creak and that's satisfactory," he commented, speaking more to himself than to Steve. "And the drawers slide easily," he observed, trying one and another. "I would hardly have expected it in a new desk." He glanced at Steve.

"We oiled the bearings and rollers, and putting soapstone on the slides helped them," said Holworth quietly.

"Very good," said Mr. Oldham, and Steve retired. He never knew it, but the same afternoon as Reuben Woolford, general superintendent, visited Mr. Oldham's office in the routine of the day's work, the president said to him: "Reub, who is the young man in charge of your utility crew?"

The superintendent answered freely and, giving himself a few approving pats on the

back, as he sometimes did, he went on to say that if newcomers had brains to begin with, it was generally possible to make something of them.

"Just so," said Mr. Oldham. "But who told him to oil and soapstone this furniture before it was brought up here?"

"Oh, that was his own idea. He knows how to think, and to do the thing that he sees to do."

"Well, that's head work. He may make you a good assistant some day, Reub. I hope he continues to come along."

"Yes, we need such men! but the devil of it is, they all want to start in as superintendents or as managers of this or that." Reub Woolford sighed. And though no more was said, he did not forget the suggestion that Steve Holworth might make him a good assistant. Well, if the "old man" were willing he should have another, he believed Holworth would in time suit him very well.

Meanwhile the subject of these remarks and reflections was punching the clock as regularly as Gus or Tony or any member of his utility crew. He was making it a point to know the factory operatives as well as men higher up. Among the latter he won the friendship of Kinney, night superintendent.

It was pleasant to visit the plant in the evening. Kinney was not very busy as a rule, but there were times when he was glad of a little willing help. Here, too, was a practical man with whom to talk of the various manufacturing processes and the why of this and that.

The very fact that the night superintendent was so friendly and helpful indirectly contributed to Steve's factory education in another way which was decidedly less pleasant. It brought the young man to sharp realization of the sober truth that men are as various as the winds that blow and often as contrary. For the practical knowledge gained as he plied Kinney with questions concerning factory operations and rubber problems naturally led Holworth to look for other information elsewhere. This was productive of embarrassment and even serious trouble before he learned that petty jealousies, artful scheming and accompanying distrust are to be found in one spot and another throughout every large organization made up of a mixed humanity.

Indeed, the ambitious Holworth was once in grave danger of finding himself discharged, due to showing himself too directly interested in another man's work. The fault was not

all his own. At least his intentions were excellent; but the other fellow saw them in another light. John Puff was a pale slender man with thin lips and eyes of watery blue. He was foreman in a department in which cotton jackets were woven for fire hose and the like. The operations of the weaving machines never failed to win Holworth's attention when passing near them. He made it a rule not to talk with workmen at their jobs but one day he had occasion to go through the weaving room during the lunch hour, found the foreman disengaged and stopped to speak with him. He asked questions concerning the speed of the machines. What must be done if a strand of the cotton should break? He inquired pretty intimately, indeed, concerning John Puff's work.

The man answered gruffly and Holworth did not long persist in his questions. With a view, however, to showing his own friendly disposition and cultivating the friendliness of the taciturn foreman, Steve made it a point to visit the weaving room again at the noon hour a few days later.

Puff met him in a manner as dry and unresponsive as a wooden image. Then, as Holworth pleasantly attempted to press conversation upon the foreman, the latter turned

to him angrily. "If you want to know anything about this department, go to the superintendent," he said sharply.

"Why, I'm sorry if I've seemed to be a nuisance," said Steve easily. "Is that the idea? I have Mr. Woolford's permission to inquire about machinery everywhere."

"I've said all I've got to say," the man answered in a sour way; and with a troubled smile Steve lingered a few seconds without replying, then quietly walked away.

Next morning Reub Woolford summoned Steve to his office.

"What's this about your buttin' in on John Puff's job in the weaving room?" he asked severely. "The man thinks you should be fired, and if you are not and if you don't quit snoopin' around his department, he says he'll quit. Says you run up there every chance you get. And I'll tell you, Holworth, we can replace you a lot easier than we can find another man for Puff's job. Why, the man actually thinks you've been trying to steal his shoes!"

"I want Puff's job?" spoke Steve in amazement. And as he noted with increasing uneasiness the superintendent's marked irritation, he added quickly: "Some exaggerated story has come to you, sir. I have not been

snooping around anywhere. The weaving apparatus interested me and I did try to learn something about it. But it was at the noon hour, and it was no more than twice at that, that I tried to talk with John Puff."

"Stick to your own job! You'll find plenty to do; and you'll learn as fast as you need to learn if you keep your wits about you. Don't let me hear of any more snoopin'."

"I'm sorry, but—"

The note of distress in Steve's voice caused Woolford to look up quickly. "But what?" he asked in a more reasonable tone than he had as yet used.

"Merely this, that John Puff has made a mountain of a molehill."

"Well, don't forget this—that there's many a man more jealous of his job and more fearful of revealing what he considers his own secrets regarding his work than you would readily suppose. They guard these things as a miser guards his money. Let 'em alone. Don't ignore them, but ask nothing. And another thing: Don't go from department to department except as your work takes you. There are men who have an idea that you're spying on them. Worse than this, it comes after a time to where one visitor is blabbing from one division to another and raising more

Hell and doing more harm in a week than he could undo in a year."

"I appreciate your saying these things to me, and I'll not forget them," Holworth answered soberly, "but for heaven's sake, do let me assure you that I have not blabbed anything from one department to another."

"Well, don't!" said the superintendent explosively, and the interview was ended.

Steve was disturbed—uneasy. He was cross with himself but he felt also such a sense of contempt and bitterness toward John Puff that his first resolve was that he would not so much as look at the man again. In the end he thought better of it all, and though he did not carry his questions to the weaving room, he nodded to the foreman whenever passing him quite as if nothing had happened. By degrees, John Puff came to return his friendly glance, but still with a mistrustful look in the corner of his eye.

This would seem to have ended the incident and so, for a time, Steve thought. Yet a week later a report came to him through the friendly Fred Kinney to the effect that he, Holworth, had endeavored to work himself into the weaving room foremanship and might have succeeded had not John Puff blocked the move in its beginning.

"Rot!" said Steve Holworth, as he learned that such gossip had reached every part of the plant.

The night superintendent laughed the matter off as of no consequence but Steve was both annoyed and ill at ease as he thought of the effect such a rumor would have among the men whose friendship he valued and whose confidence he wished to deserve. Feeling that it was useless to try to talk with Reub Woolford concerning the matter, he improved an early opportunity to lay his problem before an elderly, disinterested friend whose counsel he had come to value highly.

This gentleman was Winthrop Ensign, an executive of the Colfax Bank & Trust Company. Charles Aldervale had given a letter of introduction in that quarter as Holworth was leaving Glencoburn, advising the young man that a steadily maintained savings account is a good foundation for the established credit every man of worth must have.

Steve had found Mr. Ensign a good man to know, for other reasons as well. The gentleman was past middle age but scarcely gray and his stout, portly figure and genial ways suggested good living. At the bank his duties consisted of being Chairman of the Board and he usually had time for all callers. Thus he

was quite accessible and he liked young men. Holworth was both pleased and proud that such a friendship had come to him.

Steve's hours permitted him to see Mr. Ensign only infrequently, but at the first opportunity after the weaving room incident he called at the bank for a talk. Winthrop Ensign smiled in a fatherly way as Holworth stated the source of his trouble and asked frankly: "Mr. Ensign, if a man is the victim of a lot of false and foolish gossip, what's he going to do about it? He can't go about saying, 'This is all bunk. Forget it!' "

"No," Mr. Ensign smiled. "He cannot. And he should not. Listen, Stephen Holworth. You are troubled by a disease that gets hold of a lot of young fellows who have spunk and ambition. The trouble is you're too eager to get on—to learn, and to come forward. You are the better for being ambitious, and I would not have you otherwise; but the word you must get into your head is patience. Around the Oldham Works or elsewhere, you will find if you are thoughtful and attentive, that you will soak up knowledge as a sponge soaks up water. So don't try to master the whole subject—all the details—at once. And as for this little difficulty you speak of, you are the one to do the forgetting. If false ideas

concerning you have been set afloat, your own life and your own character will stamp them for what they are as surely as the sun shines. Don't forget that your everyday life will be as an open book, with print at least four inches high, to everyone around you. What you actually are will show itself to your associates and to everyone else who comes near enough to know you, and you can't hide the truth if you try."

Steve took Mr. Ensign's counsel close to his heart. He found, too, that it was not difficult to live down the false impressions which may have existed, though Fred Kinney laughed at him for taking old John Puff's mistrust and other similar annoyances too seriously.

There came another incident and one of greater consequence in Steve's early years at the Oldham plant which, though not belonging in just this period of the story, may properly be mentioned here. The more so as it certainly corrected any doubt which may have remained concerning the young man's disinterested and genuinely friendly spirit toward his fellow workers. It was an incident, too, which had an important bearing upon the future developments affecting Holworth's career.

It is doubtless true that Reub Woolford re-

garded himself as a fair and square man, a loyal executive of the Oldham Works and properly interested in the welfare of the rank and file of the employes. Yet his interest may have been rather too much of the same general character as his interest in the proper running of the machinery. He seemed to forget the purely human side of the men around him. Steve saw this to be the case, and he ventured to put the thought into words in a confidential talk he was once having with the superintendent.

This had been brought about through Holworth's discovery that Martin Lattin, one of the young men in the millroom, had worked out a plan by which batches of stock to be milled or calendered for urgent requirements were so constantly in the foreground that they could not be overlooked. Neither could there be any mistaking the time when the finished raw rubber or material would be needed in the department which ordered it.

"Rip-snortin' good idea," commented Chuck Ivy, the millroom foreman, pointing out the advantages of the arrangement, as Steve noticed the innovation while passing through the department. "It's a time saver and a trouble saver. If anyone doesn't have his stuff now when he wants it, 'tis his own fault."

Steve agreed, and, thinking how much this one simple improvement in operations might mean both in the millroom and elsewhere, in the course of weeks and months, he went to the general superintendent's office. He asked Reub Woolford to step down to the millroom and see just what had been done. The superintendent did so. He nodded approvingly. "Good work!" he said to Chuck Ivy. That was all. He gave not a look or thought to Martin Lattin.

As Mr. Woolford returned to his office, Steve went with him. With the superintendent again seated at his desk, Holworth said to him: "This company should take some real notice of an improvement voluntarily worked out by a minor employe, be it Mart Lattin or anyone else. And you should tell Mr. Oldham of such things. I think he'd like to hear them."

"Fiddlesticks!" sniffed Mr. Woolford, good-naturedly but contemptuously. "Go tell him, if you like. But remember this: Martin Lattin gets paid for his work. We are all bound to have an interest in our jobs, or we're no good. Why shouldn't Lattin, or any man, use his brains, if he has any?"

"He should," Steve reasoned, "and he does, in the line of his everyday work. But if he

thinks out something exceptional and it is greatly to the advantage of the company, he is entitled to recognition—entitled to know that his exceptional work is appreciated. To the human side of all of us such things mean more, it may be, than money."

Reub Woolford was in a pleasant frame of mind, it may have been, but he only laughed. "Does anybody pat me on the back if I turn a good trick now and then?" he asked. "No! No! salve has no place in any business bigger than a grocery—some one-horse joint where they may have time to tell each other how slick and clever they all are."

"Do you mind if I tell Mr. Oldham about Mart Lattin's improvement?" Steve persisted, though he laughed at the older man's way of presenting his coldly practical viewpoint.

"Go to it!" smiled Mr. Woolford, as if indulging a whim. "Fiddlesticks! Go to it! The Old Man will smile and say, 'Umh, yes,—excellent,—excellent!' and you'll feel like thirty cents."

Yet the consequence was that Holworth had a pleasant interview with the president of the Oldham Works. He had, also, the satisfaction of taking Mr. Oldham to the millroom and of hearing him personally commend both Chuck Ivy and Mart Lattin. He was present,

too, a few days later when Martin was summoned to the president's office and five crisp ten-dollar bills were handed him in further recognition of his interest and ingenuity.

In after time Steve had not a doubt that it was, in part at least, an outcome of this incident that certain developments appeared, immediately affecting Oldham operations. The first of these he considered excellent—namely, the inauguration of a well-defined plan by which employes were encouraged to suggest improvements in factory methods and operations, with rewards provided for those whose ideas were practicable and of value.

The second development was less to Holworth's liking, though he did not immediately find fault with it. It was not the thing itself which little pleased him so much as it was the manner of procedure. In a nutshell, the plan inaugurated was with a view to increased efficiency all through the works. There was nothing inherently wrong in this, surely; but in the view of Steve Holworth there was something to regret and deplore when he learned that for this task requiring careful insight, patience, tact and a friendly spirit, the man employed was none other than Joseph Gasby.

After leaving State University Joe Gasby had specialized in efficiency studies at one of

the technical schools. Later he had been with the Glencoburn quarries as efficiency engineer. And it was in such capacity and with the same title that he was now to be identified with the Oldham Company.

CHAPTER XI

PUNCHING THE CLOCK

Steve had made little effort to extend his acquaintance in the social and business circles of Colfax, yet he found that more and more the city came to have the atmosphere of home for him. Over a long period his own "nest" was but a room in a private residence. Still, it was the home of an agreeable family and, making himself agreeable in turn, he enjoyed many comforts, and he had the comfortable consciousness that in case of mishap, sickness or the like, he had a little money at his command. For, even though his first earnings had been only sixty dollars per month, he had early set himself to the practice of saving some part of every pay check and the amount had increased as his pay had been advanced.

Here was a point on which Winthrop Ensign never failed to grow eloquent in his quiet but forceful way. One of his unfailing maxims was "The young man who cannot save money cannot hope to succeed in business."

Whether the old gentleman's good counsel and friendship meant more to Steve after he came to know that Mr. Ensign was a director of the Oldham Company and an influential stockholder in other enterprises as well, might be a question. Holworth was human. It is very possible he sometimes thought, "Here is a man whose good opinion and influence may be useful to me." On the other hand, it is certainly true that Steve had valued his growing friendship with the genial banker and sought to deserve it long before he realized that the gentleman was, indirectly, one of his employers. And he knew his standing would not be injured in that quarter by the circumstance that his savings account grew steadily, however slowly.

Yet Steve was in no sense niggardly. He dressed well, as became his position. For amusements, the theatre and the like, he was more grudging of time than money, though he managed to see the most worth-while productions of the stage and screen and to hear some of the really good concerts Colfax boasted from time to time.

His mother had seen to it that his letter to the pastor of the Colfax Congregational Church was early presented. Elizabeth Aldervale had given him a letter of introduction to

a friend of hers, Miss Julia Shaffer, and this Steve presented, also. He would have liked Miss Shaffer for the sole reason that she was the friend of Elizabeth; but he found he liked her for her own sake. Such feeling appeared to be mutual and, through Miss Shaffer, Steve might easily have found himself in demand socially. But here again, the determining factor was the solemn fact that there are only twenty-four hours in a day and Holworth was too much interested in the Oldham Rubber Works to spare time for more than occasional social engagements. At best, society did not greatly interest him since he cared little for cards or dancing. There may have been something curiously domestic in his spirit, for the evenings he especially liked were those when Miss Shaffer asked him to dinner and afterward he joined the family before the home fireside. Or again, he and his hostess went to the theater or some good picture show.

There were days together, however, when long hours and heavy tasks sent Steve wearily to bed at an hour when social functions were but getting under way. He was always early at the factory. Punching the time clock at the plant had become so much a matter of course he had ceased to think of it as either a pleasant or unpleasant requirement of fac-

tory rules. It was his duty to be at the works in advance of the general run of operatives, in any case. Similarly, he was there long after the majority of the day forces were gone. As a check on his going and coming, his clock card had become less than useless, and, for that matter, he might be in and out of the plant a dozen times a day.

Yet for one particular reason Steve would gladly have been relieved of the original requirement Reub Woolford imposed in saying he would be expected to punch the clock. He hesitated to stop doing it lest his action be misconstrued; and he certainly did not mean to ask Mr. Woolford to alter the order first given him.

Steve's feeling in the matter traced back to his first year with the Oldham Company. The month was November and an invitation to the wedding of Bob Liscomb and Grace Fenlow took him to Glencoburn for that affair and for the Thanksgiving holiday. He was dressed in his best and, in the feeling of belonging in the superior city of Colfax, unconsciously he may have shown a patronizing air toward the old home town. But pride goeth before a fall, and although Steve suffered no real injury, his vanity was wounded by the discovery that everyone knew that his salary

was sixty dollars a month and that he punched a time clock at the Oldham Works, just as laborers did at the quarries.

Steve soon informed his brother Martin and with some emphasis, that as a rule it was not necessary that youngsters tell all they know; but this did not alter the present fact that the town was aware of his situation and his circumstances to the last detail. Naturally, Elizabeth Aldervale gave never a hint of having heard the intimate information which young Martin Holworth had thoughtlessly peddled; but Steve felt that she showed a certain disappointment in him. This feeling was not at all relieved as he heard of Uncle Billy Fee remarking to Elizabeth and some of her friends that, "in the case of Steve Holworth, college didn't seem to take."

And at later times when Steve found inclination and opportunity to visit the home town, he could not avoid a feeling of injury as he met and spoke to old Billy Fee and saw in the latter's eyes an expression which seemed to say, "You should really have been one of your father's carpenters" or the unspoken inquiry upon the old gardener's lips, "Was it but to punch a time clock that ye thought ye must go to college?" Steve might have smiled and thought nothing of the old man's disparaging

manner; but only too clearly he recalled the value the Aldervale family—and especially one of that family—placed upon Billy Fee's opinions.

Helping to counterbalance painful feelings gathered in such sources, and serving as a gentle balm to wounded self-esteem, were the love and pride with which he was ever received in his own home. Mrs. Holworth's pleasure in such bits of success as he had achieved was without limit. All his favorite dishes found their way to the family table. Mr. Holworth invariably sought Steve's opinions and counsel with reference to building matters.

Bob Liscomb was a mighty source of comfort. In his eyes, Steve had accomplished wonders and Bob had long since ceased to rail at his friend because, even after college, he must "still start at sixty a month and work up." Liscomb entertained the most extravagant views as to Steve's future and though the latter laughed at him, as Bob persisted in prophesying that the Holworth name would one day be at the head of the Oldham Company, there was nothing unpleasant in the company of the old friend Steve still found back of the counter at the drug store.

In his day dreams Steve wondered if it could be possible that Bob Liscomb should turn out

to be a true prophet. But only for a second at a time did he entertain such thoughts and, if he were tempted to continue them, he had only to think of the opposing view of Uncle Billy Fee. In any case, he told himself, he would keep working forward and he would not worry either one way or another as to the future. He was in Glencoburn just at this time, and glad to see the town and his friends again, but equally glad, he felt, that his own life lay in a greater sphere.

Going for a long walk by himself, Steve pondered upon all these subjects. As he made the circuit of Plum's Pastures, he peeped down into the awful depths of Hell Yawns. He stood again upon the rocks to try the echo which had tantalized his boyhood. He smiled as he recalled those former days and, thinking of the old queries he had shouted over the valley, he called now—"Say, Echo, did Philander die in Hell Yawns?"

In a way that startled him, the questioning inflection seemed so changed, the words came back as if addressed to him—"Die in Hell Yawns!"

In jerky fashion, Steve turned quickly. He had a vivid, terrifying impression that Red Kaggy was creeping on him from behind. And in the late November day the gray mists were

gathering as if they would enfold him—concealing all about him, quite as they had concealed Red Kaggy that morning so long ago.

* * * * * *

Reub Woolford was curt and often sharp with his inferiors, and rarely gracious toward his associates. One of the latter as time went on was Steve Holworth. Early in his connection with the Oldham Works he had come to consider it a great misfortune to be obliged to ask the general superintendent for additional instructions or for help of any kind. Woolford's testy temper was, indeed, one of the thorns that frequently pricked Steve miserably, but he profited in a way, by being thus driven to contrive his own methods of doing different sorts of work assigned him, and he learned to like best those undertakings which called forth his own resourcefulness.

One January came the usual advance in salary, but though this was a fine stimulus for a few weeks, Steve found himself feeling as if he were in a rut. He spoke of this while in conversation with Winthrop Ensign at the bank. Mr. Ensign regarded him for a moment as if half amused, half vexed. "The trouble with most young men," he said, "especially ambitious young men, is that they want to arrive before their time. Maturity will

come; the better jobs will come. Do today's work the best you know how; don't worry about tomorrow."

As measured by the position of the average man at his age, Holworth had no reasonable ground for complaint, but it was hard to shake off the notion that he was making no progress—that his efforts won little, if any, recognition. The Oldham Works were expanding rapidly. There were more operatives, more chemists, more engineers. He now felt that he was one of the "old" organization.

The automobile business and, therefore, the tire manufacturing business was growing to enormous volume. One result was that, to his sudden joy and surprise, Steve became an assistant superintendent. Then the years came when he no longer punched the time clock; but he smiled over what he had once regarded as a busy day, as compared to the duties which hourly faced him now.

And, if the whole of Steve Holworth's story is to be kept within the limits of a single book —and the reader spared the recital of many ups and downs, pleasures and trials, there can be but a brief summary of events over the next several years.

President Oldham himself was responsible for making Holworth assistant general super-

intendent. Coming to maturer years, Steve had broadened and developed greatly. His judgment as to plant conditions and efficiency of methods was good. He knew the operatives and was known to them. The bond of mutual liking and respect was of value to all concerned—to Steve, to the factory and to the rank and file of employes, from foremen down and up.

Holworth found his contacts with men in every division of the company's work ever helpful to his own increasing knowledge of the business. He gained a sympathetic understanding of the difficulties and heavy labor of the muscular pit men who toiled and perspired in the heat of vulcanizers, handling heavy molds and heavy tools. He knew the troubles of tire builders and others handling uncured rubber stocks when sticky weather made the material with which they worked "mean an' ornery—contrary as a bay mule," some of them would say. With lively interest he observed the work of inspectors, and studied conditions of service upon rubber products in varying fields of use.

Many of these things were but a part of the day's work. Others were voluntary studies and observations. Reub Woolford made no objection, though he was not very generous

with encouragement. The general superintendent was no longer young. His sharp ways grew sharper and advancing years increased his irritability. Steve believed it doubtful if he were keeping pace with the growth of the plant, and he willingly shouldered additional burdens as they appeared. Willingly, also, Reub Woolford turned responsibilities his way.

In general, Steve saw satisfactory conditions around him. Operatives were interested, well paid and contented. Production was on a good basis. There were dividends for stockholders. Yet there was one situation which he did not like. This was the coming of Joe Gasby as an efficiency engineer. For he was still—Joe Gasby. Fortunately, in his contacts with the superintendent's office, he rarely met anyone but Reuben Woolford.

Occasionally Steve went for a week-end in Glencoburn. His family made much of such visits and he called on Elizabeth Aldervale. He never failed to see Uncle Billy Fee on such occasions, and he noted with something of despair that, although the old man's manner was quite deferential, there was still in his eyes a look of disparagement. He always saw Bob Liscomb, too. As a partner in the drug store, Bob had made progress, but Steve could

not help thinking that he would be the better for getting away from the narrow limits of the home town now and again.

It was on a visit to Glencoburn that Steve learned of Red Kaggy being an applicant for parole from the penitentiary. The man had long been rated a desperate prisoner, and over a number of years this had barred his winning the freedom he might have earned. A new warden won him to a tractable state of mind and now he was to be conditionally free.

As to his present surroundings in Colfax, Steve had desirable quarters at the University Club. He was interested in some of the city's activities, notably the night schools, and for a time was a volunteer teacher. His associates were chiefly men older than himself. Occasionally he was asked to dinner by Winthrop Ensign or Edward Fobes. The latter was a dry, fussy little man—the secretary-treasurer of the Oldham Company. At rare intervals, also, Holworth was a guest at the Oldham home. For a delightful evening, he liked to call Jud Fassler to take dinner with him. For Jud was in Colfax now, and handling a line of the better cars. His gift of friendliness, balanced by good judgment, had made him a successful man in his field.

Steve rarely saw George W. (Gee Whiz)

Galliard, but knew of him as a special writer for the Chicago Tribune. He often bought this paper to read his old friend's articles. Ten years had passed since their separation after graduation from State University. Writing George at about this time, Steve told him of some of the changes time had wrought —and it was thus that things stood with him when, as a violent storm from a cloudless sky, there came the strike of the rubber workers and the invasion of the city of Colfax by the "Reds."

CHAPTER XII

THE RED INVASION

The Red invasion of Colfax came with sudden, terrifying violence, as little looked for as an earthquake or a volcanic eruption where never such thing had been before. Within forty-eight hours the orderly, law-respecting city was turned into a bedlam of inflamed anarchy—ugly, menacing, red-handed, deep-throated uproar.

All business was disorganized or completely suspended. Thousands of marchers in loose, straggling, unguided but highly threatening processions bore red flags everywhere. Men feared for their very lives. Many dared not venture upon the streets. From a store box on a central corner of the city a Red orator of impassioned ability waved a dirty, crimson banner as he shouted: "To Hell with law! To Hell with this Christianity bunk they've fed ye on to keep you under foot—kiddin' ye along! Santa Claus stories! To Hell with

'em, and all that rotten pretense! If you're real men, join up with them that will kill the rotten system! The mills belong to the workers! Let the bosses get their orders from 'em!"

As a tiny flame may quickly become a death-dealing conflagration, so did this experience with an unreasoning, senseless, Red rebellion in Colfax spring from an insignificant source. There were various factors contributing to later violence and anarchy, inspired chiefly by outside leadership, which quickly became a part of the so-called strike; but these elements of terror and unchecked lawlessness were in no way present at the inception of the trouble.

The very beginning of it all was in the Oldham Rubber Works. Reub Woolford may not have been entirely in sympathy with practices and methods used by Joe Gasby as an efficiency engineer, but company executives, himself included, had employed the man, and the way of least resistance was to give Mr. Gasby a free hand—far too free, indeed, as events were soon to prove. Though Mr. Woolford was personally of the opinion that Mr. Gasby was doing more harm than good, he was nevertheless dimly aware that "efficiency" was in fashion and it did not occur to him to inquire whether there might not be among

the so-called experts men unsuited to such work. He wholly failed to grasp the fact that Mr. Joseph Gasby was no more adapted to talk with workmen concerning any topic, least of all increased production at their hands, than a hawk is suited to agreeable contacts with a flock of pheasants.

Steve Holworth had observed the coming of Gasby and the man's activities in the plant with serious misgiving. Yet he felt that his tongue was completely silenced by old dislike and prejudice—that if he commented adversely as to Gasby or Gasby's methods, his views would be attributed to the long-standing cool indifference with which each had regarded the other. And when he found himself finally driven to protest it was, alas, too late. At the very moment when he was reporting to the general superintendent observations not at all favorable to the efficiency engineer, there came Jim Cottle, tuberoom foreman, hot and angry. Like a man driven to the last extremity he burst into Mr. Woolford's office.

"Thirty men have walked out on me! This damned efficiency guy is goin' to wreck the place!"

"All right, let 'em go!" Woolford snapped. "Holworth, you were saying—"

"Cottle has told it—the thing I feared has

happened!" was the answer, with terse significance.

"Say, who's running this mill?" Woolford's voice cracked like a shot from a gun. "Are we to get orders from the hands? Jim, is your whole crew out?"

"I have eight tube makers left. I could use forty. As I came through the plant, Gus Carlson's bicycle tire builders were in a row. There's Hell to pay all through the works! This man Gasby—"

"That's not your business!" Reub Woolford snapped sharply. "Go back to your department, Jim! I'll see what we can do for you," he added more agreeably.

With the opening of the door as the foreman was leaving, the ominous sound of jeering yells was heard, then a muffled roar of voices lower pitched—a roar which was to rise in volume and hold a city dazed, disorganized, stricken as by a scourge.

Jim Cottle's tube builders were joined by most of the makers of bicycle tires, as for a minute or two the former ventured to parade the factory grounds, jeering and shouting, hooting the name of Gasby in contemptuous merriment and calling upon others to join them as for a holiday. The month was February and the weather cold and raw, but many

windows flew open wide as in one department and another men looked out to discover the cause of the disturbance. Here and there one and another threw down his tools and with words of derision for those who remained rushed heedlessly to join the strikers' ranks.

Reub Woolford answered a hurried telephone call from the office of President Oldham. Holworth improved the opportunity to go calmly but quickly through all parts of the plant. In a manner of being neither flustered nor irritated by what all now knew had happened, he nodded to workers looking up to him as he passed among them. Most of these men were personally known to him. He could call the greater number by name. He paused to talk with foremen. "Don't let your fellows get excited," he said. "Keep their heads level. Every man in the Works can count on a square deal, but rough-house stuff is no way to present a protest. If there are any grievances, take 'em up in the right manner." And more than one foreman answered that there were grievances. Almost without exception these were traceable directly to the tactless methods of the efficiency engineer.

A brief talk with Jim Cottle showed the immediate trouble in his department to have arisen in a scheme Gasby had originated

which, he told the men, would "eliminate lost motion." As some questioned the practicability of doing the work just as he proposed, he retorted hotly: "There will be a new rate in this department, and anyone who wants to earn just half the easy money he has been getting can keep to the old way of doing the job. With the next move, his place will be filled by someone willing to learn."

Irritated by Gasby's methods all through the period of his investigations in the department, and now fiercely resenting both the changes proposed and the way in which they were presented, a hot-headed fellow, though having an excellent record as a workman, shouted angrily: "I say, let him do it any way he damn pleases! Come on! This ain't the only job a man can work on! Are you goin' to let him spit on you? Every man who is a man, come on with me!"

Nearly every man in the room threw down the tools in hand. Soon they were into the yard and into the street, shouting noisily, derisively. Some of the group were mature and intelligent workmen, like the man who had first openly declared resentment. The majority were younger—thoughtless, eager for adventure; and these went out as for a frolic—a holiday which imposed a costly reckoning.

Such was the rubber workers' strike in its earliest aspects. The original trouble was in the Oldham Works alone. Neither the Great Western nor the National companies, both operating extensive factories, was affected at the outset. Local newspaper accounts of the walk-out were doubtless exaggerated. Highly colored stories of the strike were printed in other cities. Within twenty-four hours a swarm of agitators from near and distant points had arrived upon the scene. Before sundown of the second day the strikers were egged on and their ranks augmented by Red adherents of such organizations as the Industrial Workers of the World, better known as the I. W. W. (Facetiously, and not without reason—"I Won't Work".) It was not only men of other rubber plants who joined the strike. All the riffraff—the flotsam of the city, poured out to swell the threatening multitude, each looking to profit by the disorder as opportunities were found. All told, it was a miscellaneous mass of largely irresponsible humanity which milled about the factory entrances and threatened the city with violence.

In a day, the disorder was wholly beyond control of the city police department. Political differences among executives of the city —a pandering to the lowest element of the

"labor vote" on part of some—prevented early measures to quell the disturbance or to check the threatened consequences. A committee of citizens calling upon the governor of the state for aid of militia met only a polite rebuff. Misled by false information and the advice of misguided political lieutenants, the governor at first declined to act, then temporized and, by palpable evasion, allowed the disorder to continue and the danger to increase. On the third day local officials closed all saloons. From then on efforts of the police department were necessarily confined to the prevention of the greater crimes of arson, public pillaging and destruction of life.

On the second day of the outbreak, as President Oldham left his office and passed through the red-badged ranks to enter his automobile, he was struck on the head by a brickbat thrown from the strikers' ranks. He fell. Helped by a few men who openly denounced such tactics, he managed to leave the place. Reub Woolford, going outside the gates and angrily ordering the crowd to disperse, was felled by a blow from the fist of a big, raw-boned tire builder clothed in tailor-made suit, costly fur overcoat and flaming silk shirt.

While this outbreak was in progress about

the main factory entrance, Steve Holworth was showing Oldham operatives who had remained at work a way through a rear gate by which they might reach their homes unmolested. In pelting rain he stood at this little-used exit, cautioning each one who passed out to avoid the strikers and on returning to the plant next morning to enter by the rear gate. For, curiously, in view of the strike having had its origin in the Oldham Works, it was this factory that was least affected as the trouble grew and the strikers' ranks were swelled by hourly accessions.

Steve Holworth, personally, was credited with this gratifying condition. There was not a man but felt that he was a dependable friend. Even after the plant was closed, many of the operatives were eager and willing to be at work. It was their faith in Holworth, too, which held yet others loyal at heart, even though they sought the easy way of avoiding trouble by pinning the crimson badge of the Reds upon their coats. There was cowardice in such action, but for those personally concerned, there was also seeming prudence. No workman dared declare opposition to the red badge. Even business men venturing to express sympathy for those who would have been at work, had the strikers permitted it,

were in grave danger. Insult and abuse were heaped upon would-be peacemakers everywhere.

Meantime, in doorways and on boxes dragged to vantage points of the business district, Industrial Workers of the World were busily enrolling new converts to the Red cause. A membership card and a tawdry bit of crimson ribbon were for all who presented the fee of two dollars. Hilariously hundreds of the younger men—the holiday-making type—"joined" time and again. Many such wore not one red badge but several; and the Red leaders who enlisted these recruits carried bulging wallets.

Of those who signed the membership rosters, not one in ten knew what it was all about, or cared. There was not one in a hundred of the actual rubber workers who could say he had a genuine grievance against the manufacturers. Yet collectively they joined in the clamor, "The mills belong to the workers!" Less frequently the real source of discontent among the better element was voiced in, "Can the 'Efficiency'!"

Taking pains to examine and check conditions in all the larger Colfax factories, Steve Holworth found good pay and a generally satisfactory situation everywhere save on the

point of "efficiency", at least so-called, and the "speeding up" processes inaugurated by the new school of engineering represented by Mr. Joseph Gasby.

On the streets and in their own smoke-filled hall, Holworth was often among the strikers. Always he sought out Oldham operatives—the men he knew. "You don't belong to this thing, Bob; better cut it," he would suggest, quietly. Or to another a whispered word: "Better get clear of this, Dick. Stay clear. These Reds are going to make a rotten mess for the boys who have left good jobs."

The strike had been on for some days when Holworth was again in the hall. In a dim corner of the large room—a loafing place by day, and a meeting place, with fierce, inflammatory speeches by the Reds at night—two men sat at a small table. Low tones and facial expressions which did not change guarded their conversation. With the lifting of an eyebrow and the faintest possible motion of his head, one of them indicated the man who moved quietly here and there speaking to one and another of the red-badged throng, never lingering in conversation, and approaching only individuals or little knots of two or three.

"Sure, I know that guy! An' he's doin' us no good," the second of the two at the table said. "I have had an eye on him before now. An' believe me, I'm goin' to fix him! He's had it comin' from me for a long time."

"So? Better not talk about it here. Come with me."

Casually, as if wholly indifferent to the buzzing flies feeding on the invisible red carrion making all the atmosphere of the place a stench to law and honest manhood, the two arose and went into an inner room.

CHAPTER XIII

"DON'T LEAVE THE PLANT"

After the third day of the strike all the rubber factories were closed. Executives would not ask loyal men to risk safety by attempting to reach their work. Not a wheel turned. Entrance gates were locked and guarded. With a few exceptions, office employes were also instructed to remain at home.

The great brick structures of the Oldham plant were silent. Detached bands of strikers —really a picket to keep employes from returning to their places—passed frequently along the streets on all sides of the factory premises. Save for these and the idly curious who loitered at a distance, the whole vicinity of the Works, usually presenting most busy scenes, was apparently deserted.

Steve Holworth was practically living at the plant. He had smuggled a score of dependable operatives—some stalwart, brawny

pit men among them—into the factory as a reserve guard, should an emergency arise. These men slept in a room equipped as a company hospital. In the cafeteria a cook was on duty.

Sore from the blow he had received and the bruises of his fall, and wholly upset in temper, Reub Woolford, general superintendent, was at his home. President Oldham was confined to his home likewise, and severely ill, partly from the injury he had received, but even more from distress of mind as reports of the Red invasion grew worse.

Edward Fobes, venerable treasurer of the Oldham Company, visited his office but once. He seemed more dazed than visibly distressed but, saying he could be of no use, he went home. Thereafter he never ventured out but to go daily to Winthrop Ensign's office on the mezzanine floor of the bank. From that elevated and somewhat hidden point, he looked out upon the straggling processions of red badges, and muttered savagely. Again and again he turned to Winthrop Ensign to ask, "What is the country coming to?" Over and over the same query, and even the usually optimistic banker shook his head gravely.

It was the fifth day since the strike began, when Paymaster Dee Willard came hurriedly

into Steve Holworth's office. "What are we going to do about paying off?" he asked nervously. "And how are we to do it, if at all? Tomorrow will be regular pay day for all tire departments and most of the trouble makers belong there. Think of it, by gosh! Trouble makers! And every man of 'em taking down from seventy to a hundred dollars every two weeks! But what can I do? Nobody here, and Mr. Fobes won't talk one way or another, even if I could reach him."

"Western and National both have pays tomorrow, don't they?" Steve asked.

Dee Willard believed so, and Steve called executives of those plants. They had not decided, they said, what they might better do. It looked like a foolish thing to put money into the pockets of the strikers, one suggested.

"I am inclined to think that each factory should pay, as usual," Steve argued in return. "If necessary, let the money come from the bank in an armored car. We can get a police guard for that, at least. To pass a pay day gives the Reds an argument that they'll make a mountain of. Then, too, there are some of our men who want to get out of town—stay away till this thing is over. Half of our people wearing red badges do so only because they're scared to death. They get into

parades and meetings for no other reason. Oldham will pay as usual and we're posting notices at every gate."

And so the others also agreed that no regular pay day should be deferred. Going to the bank, Steve reported to Mr. Fobes the action decided upon, asking the treasurer to countersign the paymaster's voucher for the currency needed.

"The matter of paying the help wouldn't seem to be a part of your office," said the old gentleman in his deliberate way. He did not speak harshly but nervously, gloomily—an injured feeling in his tone.

"That is true," Steve smiled. "But it lies in my office to get the wheels turning again after any sort of breakdown. I had no thought to overstep my authority, but this is a time when regular procedure may not be practicable."

"And he's absolutely right, Edward," put in Mr. Ensign vigorously. "Five minutes ago you were troubled about the scare among Oldham stockholders. Let it be known that the company has missed a pay day, for any reason, and you've got still more scared stockholders." Turning to Steve, he added: "These anarchists have done a lot of harm but they have been helped by the outside public. Think

of it! A week ago people clamoring for Oldham stock at ninety-five. Today you can buy a cartload for fifty-five. That's how outside stockholders stand by us! Steve Holworth, we're glad you're on the job!"

"Yes, Steve, you've done quite right," Mr. Fobes assented, in a dazed way. "Quite right!"

Leaving the bank, Holworth walked about town in a casual manner, but attentive to all he saw. There were red badges on all sides. The city seemed stricken as by a pestilence. Stores and business places were all but deserted. The usual throng of afternoon shoppers was wholly absent. As if on the most ordinary business, he entered Jud Fassler's sales establishment. Jud met him with a nod, and Steve passed on into an inner office.

A young man wearing a worn overcoat, a dirty cap and a conspicuous red badge rose to meet him.

"What word?" asked Holworth quietly.

"Same old stuff," the fellow answered dispiritedly. "I'm so sure they've got me spotted, I am afraid to seem much interested. But things are no better. They're worse."

"Spotted? How do you know?"

"I don't exactly know, but the Reds have

cautioned every man to keep his mouth shut. There's dope getting out that they don't want out. They've cut the telephone cables to all the rubber plants."

"I have heard of it. What else?"

But the young man said there was nothing else to report.

"Well, stay on the job," Steve urged. "Don't take chances, but keep your eyes and ears open. You better not see me again, but report to Mr. Fassler. I'll be in touch with him."

Holworth was leaving the place when Fassler called him. "George Galliard is in town and wants to see you. He's at the Sherman."

"Fine! I must see him," Steve smiled. "This is the best news yet. Come on, it will be interesting to see Gee Whiz in action."

George W. Galliard, special writer for a great newspaper, was only one of a dozen correspondents of the metropolitan press sent to Colfax to cover the strike and the accompanying invasion of Red leaders and sympathizers. Yellow journals were in evidence, of course. The muckrakers were busy. Out of sheer fiction passed to them in the Red propaganda, stories of "oppressed labor" and "suffering strikers", they had written reports as helpful to the Red cause as they were dam-

aging to the town of Colfax. But George Galliard was none of these. His one purpose was to get the "brass tacks" of it all, and he used methods of his own.

The three old college mates had a merry meeting but a brief one. Both Steve and George had work in hand. As for Jud,—"Business is flat," he growled. "I tell you the town is scared senseless by half a hundred outside anarchists and a thousand deluded suckers that they've fed up on the kind of dope they deal in. Except for these, and the poor devils who tag along because they are afraid not to, the strike would have been over in two days."

"Business poor, eh?" smiled Holworth. "In that case, how'd you like to drive me out to see Reub Woolford? Then I want to call on Mr. Oldham."

"Glad to do it," said Fassler heartily. "And, by the way, I'll show you a new six-cylinder that will open your eyes. You ought to have one!"

The car proved to be big and powerful. Holworth expressed his admiration.

"Good for seventy on a straightaway," Jud declared with enthusiasm.

Steve found Reuben Woolford propped up in an easy chair at his home. The man seemed

more worried than ill, but he was keenly interested in all that Holworth could tell him. Unfortunately, in Steve's opinion, the general superintendent's vision appeared warped. He was bitter in his denunciation of the Oldham operatives. He blamed foremen for not reporting to him when they found discord or dissatisfaction, wholly forgetful that he had made it difficult for them to approach him. He obstinately declared that Joe Gasby's efficiency methods were not to be blamed, but praised. His view of the future was forlorn, indeed.

After such conversation, it was a source of relief to Holworth to find President Oldham showing real courage. The aged executive had suffered greatly from shock. The brickbat thrown at him had done less harm than the knowledge that the missile came from the ranks of Oldham employes, well treated throughout the twenty-two years he had been at the head of the Oldham Works. But, showing his brighter spirit, he said to Steve: "You are doing a good job, Holworth. It's a comfort to have young shoulders to lean upon in such a time, and we appreciate it. Joe Gasby has been in to see me, too. He has been, and will be, of use to us. Manufacturing problems cannot be solved as we used to

do it. Gasby tells me that in his two years at the Glencoburn quarries he increased production thirty per cent."

Steve might have added: "Yes, and he caused an increased labor turnover of twice that, and the quarries made less money than before." But this was no time for such a discussion and he let the subject pass.

The sharp drop in the market for rubber stocks was annoying if not really worrying Mr. Oldham. "Such slaughter of quotations is unheard of," he protested in an earnest but feeble voice. His thin hand, raised in emphasis above the draperies of his bed, was hardly less white than they. "People sell without reason. Frightened? Yes! But if these anarchists should force the closing of the plants for a year, the property would still be there," he said vehemently. "If I were on my feet they would not get our stock at fifty dollars a share!"

"Fifty-five!" Steve quietly suggested.

"Fifty!" said the old gentleman, cheerlessly. "Five hundred shares at fifty, just before the market closed. Winthrop Ensign telephoned me. And the worst is, I am afraid it was Reub Woolford's stock. If our own people have lost faith in us—"

The aged president shook his head despair-

ingly; but, coming presently to a better state of mind, he again commended Holworth for standing by the property and the loyal operatives.

As he took leave, Steve was much concerned about Mr. Oldham's condition. He had never seen the man look so worn and ill. Some bit of good news would be a helpful restorative and, resolving to find cheering information somewhere, he rejoined Jud Fassler, patiently awaiting him. As they drove back to the Fassler salesrooms, Steve asked a favor.

"Jud," he said, "I must be in the plant tonight, and I wish you'd scout around for an hour or two. Look into the Big Schooner saloon. They keep the back door open, and the place is a hang-out for the crew we have to deal with. Keep your eyes and ears open, but the less you talk, the better. I think the Reds may be coming to feel that they've about milked this proposition. They may be ready to get out. At any rate, see what you can pick up. With the telephone wires cut, I must stick close to the Works. If they have any mine to spring, that's where it will probably be."

Fassler gladly agreed to do all that was asked of him. Also he counseled Holworth to go about the streets no more than necessary.

"If there's any one man they'd like to have out of the picture, it is yourself," he declared.

Steve smilingly promised to remember that "discretion may be the better part of valor."

Leaving Jud at the motor salesrooms, he took his way to the center of the business district. A larger parade than usual was passing. Evidently it had been staged at this hour to impress scattered workers now leaving stores, offices and shops for their homes. The sidewalks were lined by these and others who watched the marchers pass. Among the latter Steve observed a doggedly sullen manner such as he had not seen in the earlier processions. Former noisy hilarity was wholly missing. Such voices as were raised called out to men along the streets to "Overturn the system!"—"Throw off the chains!"—"Let the bosses work, or starve!" A long banner borne by a dozen men urged all wage earners to attend a great meeting in the strikers' hall at eight o'clock. Another read: "Own them, or wreck them!"

The latter was direct reference to the Red doctrine that all the machinery of production must be given up to the workers. As an indirect call for the damaging of factory equipment, it was not a new demand. Steve had heard much such talk. Sabotage, which is to

say, the secret damaging of machinery or other property by factory operatives, had made its appearance in more than one of the Colfax plants. But the Red menace had never before flaunted such purposes so boldly. Where would it end?

Through the gloom of the winter twilight Holworth plodded on to the Oldham Works. The air was damp and chill. Wind-driven snow swept the black, wet streets, piling itself in drifts against the curbing. Creaking signs swayed in the gale which, rushing boisterously through wide thoroughfares, howling and shrieking in dark corners and alleys, seemed bent on some devilish Red mission of its own.

With a word to the watchmen at the factory gate, Steve passed on to the company cafeteria. Over coffee and sandwiches he talked with the "minute men", awaiting such developments as might come. The day had been quiet, they said. Asking all to be extra vigilant for the night, Holworth went to his office. As he tried to picture what another day might bring, a gatehouse watchman entered.

"A bell boy from the Sherman brought this sir," said the man. "He came running to the gate, and as I stepped out, he handed me this

letter, and skipped away like a rabbit. Why, sir, the Red devils have the town in goose flesh!"

Holworth took the plain white envelope addressed to him. Enclosed he found a mere scrap of paper and scrawled upon it, in evident haste: "Don't leave the plant," and again, heavily underscored, "DON'T LEAVE THE PLANT."

"The boy seemed scared, did he?" Holworth put the question, thoughtfully. "Was he alone?"

"All alone, sir; and scared—indeed, yes!"

"All right, Sam. If anyone asks for me at the gate, bring him up."

CHAPTER XIV

A STORMY NIGHT

"Don't leave the plant."—Steve sat back in his chair and read the penciled words again. "DON'T LEAVE THE PLANT!" Here, as well as on the envelope he believed he recognized the old, familiar scrawl of George Galliard. This confidence, together with the fact of the message having been delivered by a Sherman bell boy, gave certain assurance that Galliard had sent the ominous lines. Then, presently, Steve smiled. The questioning feeling of an unknown, impending danger vanished as quickly as it had come. He looked at the note again and tossed it upon his desk. Clearly, he now perceived, the message was not intended as a warning but was merely urgent in its request that he remain within reach. Galliard had some particular purpose in wishing to see him.

"Very well, I have no intention of going out," Holworth mused; but he stepped to the

window and noted the outlook—the pelting sleet and snow, the factory grounds barely recognizable under the dull white glare of the yard lights so submerged were they in the thick damp of the black and wind-swept night. Save for the gale, all was quiet, and Steve returned to his desk to await Galliard's coming.

It was about nine o'clock when a watchman came to the office. "Mr. Holworth," he said, "there's a car at the gate for you, and the driver asks will you go down to the Sherman hotel to see a gentleman who has sent for you?"

Steve paused before replying. "Don't leave the plant," rang in his ears; but again he threw off the feeling of danger the note had at first inspired. It was obvious that Galliard wished to see him—obvious that the newspaperman needed him in connection with the report he would be sending the Tribune, and the telephone lines were cut. He quickly arose and put on his storm coat. To the watchman he said: "This call is from the man who had intended coming here tonight. In case anyone asks for me later, you may say that I will be back in an hour or so."

"Yes, sir."

Coming to the gate, Holworth saw a long, gray touring car at the curb. The driver, muffled in a greatcoat and a cap pulled low, bent head and shoulders to the stinging wind as he stood at the tonneau door. In one sharp glance at the man, Steve determined that he would bear watching. And yet he hardly knew the reason of his distrust. There were no uniformed taxi drivers in Colfax and many of the "jitneys" were touring cars—new and old—all kinds. With a wave of his hand he signaled the driver to take the wheel, stepped into the curtained, unlighted tonneau, closed the door and sat down. Still, he observed the driver closely.

Instantly the car was under way, picking up speed at a dangerous rate. A block or two, then suddenly a wide sliding turn into a dark side street—and at this moment a pair of arms shot out from beneath a robe thrown loosely in a corner of the tonneau. The blanket enfolded Holworth's head and shoulders and a hand gripped his throat as by a torque.

No word was spoken, but the car rushed on at greater speed, crashing through the half-frozen mud of an unpaved street. A spray of clay and grime mingled with the sweeping snow. Solid roadbed was reached

again as the machine skidded violently into a main thoroughfare. The fury of the pace increased. In the darkness of the city's outer districts, the flying automobile seemed like some monstrous bird of prey, with fiercely glaring eyes, its black wings spread to the raging storm.

* * * * * *

Of the two men seated apart in the strikers' smoke-filled hall who had that day sharply noticed Steve Holworth's approach to one man and another, the mutual recognition, the changing expression of the men he so quietly addressed, one was a gaunt, muscular fellow, probably thirty-five years of age. The close-clipped hair just showing below his battered felt hat was a lively red. So also was the two-days' growth of beard upon his lowering face. The other was a man of forty, of medium height and figure, dark of hair and skin but, compared to his companion, clean and well dressed. His deep-set eyes and something of ferocity about his mouth and chin alone marked him as unlike the rank and file of those who loitered about the hall. There was a self-possessed air about him, and well there might be; for this was one of the most unscrupulous of the Reds—one of the most daring of those whose

dreadful war had turned an originally insignificant strike into a devastating and, it might yet be, a bloody disaster, to the city of Colfax. Such was Emil Drahski.

He signaled with a nod as his companion repeated that he knew this man whose friendly way among the strikers had attracted their notice, and both arose and sauntered leisurely to an inner room. It was a half-lighted apartment, crudely fitted as an office. They sat down.

"You say you know that man. What about it?"

"Know him? I'll tell ye how well I know him! It's Holworth of the Oldham Works. You know that; but you don't know he lied like a horse-thief to send me over the road. I told him what he'd get for it! Oh, he's got plenty comin' to him from me!" and Red Kaggy looked squarely into the sharp scrutiny of the other's eyes.

"If you mean anything by that," said Drahski calmly, "you'll never have as good a chance again. What's more, he's the man we've got to lick. Do that, and this town will eat out of our hands in three days."

"You're damn right!" said Kaggy blusteringly. "The soft guys fall for him. I've got my own cards to play, but it don't have to be

solitaire." The man grinned significantly and Drahski patted his shoulder approvingly.

Slowly the Red leader elicited all of Kaggy's story. Insidiously he egged the man on. After a long, low conversation they left the inner room, separating at the door. They met during the strikers' parade later in the day, and again they were together in the hall in advance of the night meeting. From their seat in a corner, they observed a tall young man in business attire going here and there among the strikers, now entering. The stranger noticed the two who sat apart, but seemed to give them no heed. Yet presently he stood but a yard or two away, calmly smoking, calmly looking about.

Catching Kaggy's glance, Drahski raised his eyebrows meaningly. His companion arose and approached the stranger.

"Are you one of us?" demanded Red Kaggy in sharp undertone. "If you are, all right. If not, beat it!"

"Public meeting, isn't it?" the man inquired coolly.

"It won't be healthy to get fresh here!" came the answer in threatening tone, and Kaggy's fist was clenched.

Quietly Drahski arose. "Don't start anything," he smiled. "You have bigger work

to do," and he glanced at his companion. Turning to the other—Jud Fassler, making the survey asked of him by Holworth—he said: "Friend, if you are one of us, welcome. Otherwise, we have use for every foot of space."

With a searching glance at both men, Fassler turned away. He was at his office two hours later when a night service man came in from the garage. "Somebody drove off with Harry Champ's new Haynes," the employe reported. "You know the rig—nice job—long, gray body, four doors. He hadn't had it a month. Left it in the alley by his store at eight o'clock and at nine it just wasn't there. There were two of 'em that got it—anyhow two of 'em when they filled up with gas and oil at Flick's station."

* * * * * *

At the Sherman hotel George Galliard received reports from the "underground" aids he had employed as a means of getting inner information amplifying his own investigations. He had lately returned from the strikers' night meeting. His trained senses told him that the very air was charged as by dynamite as the Red leaders insidiously urged forward the deluded men looking to their guidance. Thus the newspaperman was the

less surprised when one of his workers came in to say: "They are bound to lick the Oldham Works first. Holworth has been doing 'em damage there and everywhere; and they've tagged him to be put away for a time. That much, anyhow; maybe more. It may happen tonight. They're tightening up on talk everywhere; but I got this only second-handed from Drahski himself."

Galliard keenly sensed the danger. He knew Holworth was spending the night at the Oldham Works. Hastily he wrote: "Don't leave the plant." He repeated the warning, underscoring the words heavily. Asking the bell captain for a thoroughly dependable boy, he sent the warning message on its way. With his news story for the Tribune finished, he took the copy personally to the telegraph office, then continued on to Fassler's salesrooms.

Much disturbed by all that he had seen and heard, Jud sat at his desk absorbed in dark reflections. He brightened as Galliard entered. "Tell me the worst first," he smiled; but his face grew quickly sober.

Galliard's expression was ominously serious. "Jud," said he, "they're going to put 'the work' on Steve Holworth. I know that much, and I sent Steve a word of caution. Now you

and I are going out to the Oldham offices to see him and among us we're going to frame a plan to let these anarchists go right ahead with their scheme, whatever it is. And when it comes to the springing of their trap, we are going to block it and expose it. You and I will not only help lick these devils, but it will make a hot story for me. So much for purely selfish motives. But whether that part of the plan works out is secondary. The big point is that we've got to impress Steve with the fact that he can't come and go as freely as he does. They want him out of the way at any cost; and they're going to get him away from town, if nothing worse. I doubt if they'll stop at that."

Jud was already getting into his coat. Less than ten minutes elapsed before Fassler's prized six stood at the gate of the Oldham Works. Together the two men confronted the watchman, keeping to the lee of the gate-house as the sharp wind swirled the eddying snow up, and up, to the night's black dome above the entrance lights faintly illuminating the scene.

"Mr. Holworth is not here," said the man. Then recognizing Fassler, he added more freely: "He left about nine. A car came from the Sherman for him, and he was to meet a

party there. He said he'd return in an hour—but 'tis more than that now."

"What sort of a car?" Fassler asked thoughtfully.

"A long car—touring type—a gray Haynes with four doors."

Jud turned quickly to Galliard: "Harry Champ's car—stolen at eight-thirty tonight!"

"Was there a messenger here earlier, with a note for Mr. Holworth?" This was Galliard's question.

"Yes, he received a letter brought by a boy from the hotel. He thought this would be the party that was now sending the car for him."

"Jud, *they've got him!* My blunder!" Galliard gasped. "What a moron to send a blind note!"

Fassler's thoughts had not been idle. He spoke rapidly as he swiftly brought the car about: "I'll swear I know a part of this. Do you recall Steve's experience in stumbling upon a bank bandit long ago? I'll make oath that I saw that red-head this very night! I saw that man with Drahski himself, and I heard Drahski hint that there was a job to do."

"That man!" said Galliard. His voice had a startled inflection. "You know his threat?"

"Yes, and he's out of the pen on parole—

released a month ago. Recall Hell Yawns—all his threats? Yes! Cut it short, George, as you look into the Sherman to make sure; but I know Steve's not there. It's Glencoburn way for us—ninety miles to go, and they have a start of two hours!"

Fassler was right. Holworth had not been seen at the Sherman.

In five minutes a night service man was filling the car with gasoline and oil at Fassler's garage and helping Jud to put chains on all four wheels. In the office, George Galliard tried vainly to get long distance telephone connections with Glencoburn, failing which he tried for Ardmore, a town in between. The fierce gale still raged. Wires were down.

"I'm quite sure we'll be getting through tomorrow sometime," was the operator's pleasant assurance.

Tomorrow! Galliard groaned aloud. In another moment he was in the seat at Fassler's side. Doors banged. The six shot into the snowy street and away—away through the wind-driven snow.

"Ninety miles! They've been on the way two hours."

A gas station was still open at the corner where the road to Glencoburn bore away from a main Colfax thoroughfare. Sparks flew

from the tire chains as the heavy six came to a sharp stop at the pumps. The slow drawl of the attendant was exasperating to the last degree, but the information was good. The long, gray Haynes—yes, he had seen the car. "They drawed up at the corner, seemin' to hesitate as to the road. I was lookin' for 'em to come in for to ask me; but they finally didn't—just turned off to Glencoburn way, and in another half a minute you'd 'a' thought they'd been shot out of a gun."

Beyond a doubt their objective was Glencoburn—ninety miles! And with Fassler's foot on the accelerator, the heavy six was away at great speed, through sweeping wind and piling drifts, splitting the black night like a meteor.

CHAPTER XV

AGAIN PLUM'S PASTURES

"Cold, Jud?"

"No."

For the first time since babyhood, George Galliard mused, Fassler's tongue was continuously silent. Well, 'twas better so, he thought. All the wits they both could muster would probably be needed. How could the Reds have lured Steve from his office? Why had he so little heeded the caution, "Don't leave the plant"?

Ardmore! Forty snowy miles left swiftly to the rear. A town clock tolling the midnight hour. A long street of dark and silent dwellings. Overhanging arc lights faintly illuminating the white, deserted way. Above, dark tree-tops threshing in the blustering gale. One dim light in a garage, with gas pump at the curb.

"Better inquire, Jud?"

"Try. Probably no use." The snow-filled wheels curved swiftly to the pump and

stopped. A minute that seemed like thirty, and a man met Galliard at the door. A few low words and Galliard quickly to his seat again.

"They stopped here. Bought tire chains. Garage man saw only one man—red-headed! Get going!"

Get going? What waste of breath! Going, ere yet the words were spoken—going terrifically, and clouds of snow flying back from the speeding wheels! Endless scurrying snow showers caught and tossed in the swirling currents! Going at furious speed, as if the black night, momentarily broken by the flying pair of glaring lights and constantly closing in behind, were in pursuit of a demon that dared rend its heavy, somber mantle. And on and on thus, unceasingly!

"Got a gun, George?"

"Yes. You?"

"In that door-pocket beside you. Get it out. Put it in the seat behind me."

No break in the rush of the wind—no pause in the hum of the motor gamely bucking the deep, white drifts—ever speeding on and on.

Suddenly out of the darkness far ahead appeared a dull glimmer—indistinct, red. A tail light, unmistakably.

"Looks like the Haynes, Jud." The positive

words were not at all positive in Galliard's questioning inflection.

"Must be. They made no time till they got the chains at Ardmore." And with the words, Fassler pressed the accelerator lower. The great car traveled faster still. On either side clouds of snow flew higher. To the rear, a blinding blizzard raged in miniature as the snow-filled air was caught in swirling eddies and carried up, as if to the scurrying clouds above.

For a time the red light disappeared. Soon again it was in view, yet almost hidden by the driving snow. A few minutes, and the glow of headlights forward shone suddenly over the fields to the left. The car ahead was turning sharply in that direction, its flood of hazy light clearly seen across the open spaces, blanketed by drifts.

"I think it's our party, but they aren't going to Glencoburn," Fassler muttered. "And things look no better on that account. I know the trail they're on. It goes through a nasty bit of country and to the river beyond. There's an old sawmill there. A black, desolate place."

"What's to do?" asked Galliard in tones that meant action. "Could you drive without lights? If so, we can come up to them without being seen."

"The other way's to rush 'em. Ditch 'em, if need be," Fassler answered in like spirit; and "Go to it!" said Galliard.

At once the long six ploughed from the main highway into the narrow trail across the fields. At the right of the path, the lights showed a broad and apparently deep ditch, for the snow had not yet found a level over it. The car ahead had slowed down after leaving the main road, and Fassler's heavy machine swept toward it like a rocket. Almost upon the object of the wild pursuit, the two men saw the forward car leap suddenly into terrific speed. At once it drew away, but the distance separating the two automobiles was increased for only the briefest time. With his foot on the gas, Fassler pulled fiercely to the left. He crowded forward. Doggedly the other car kept to the center of the narrow road, denying him passage. Jud gave the motor the last ounce of power and his car shot into a wide curve out through the snow, taking a wire fence with it as furiously it plunged ahead. In another curve it swept back to the trail again, squarely in front of the strange machine, which had come to a violent stop.

"Bring your gun, Jud!" and even as he spoke, Galliard was leaping to the ground, his own revolver in hand.

"It's not the Haynes—a bloomin' Chalmers!" Fassler growled like a wolf. But—"Hands up, there!" he yelled, leveling his gun before him.

"Take it easy, you—easy, whatever's the game!" came a voice out of the snow and darkness, and a big man in an enormous coat, his soft hat pulled about his ears, climbed gingerly from the strange machine.

He did not put up his hands but he spoke again quickly, earnestly: "If it's money you're after, you're welcome to about two dollars and a half. It's all I have; but for God's sake don't touch my medicine case or surgeon's kit and don't delay me. I'm a doctor and a man who was crushed under an automobile on this rotten road is waiting for me at some house below here. It's life or death for him. So get through, quick!"

"Doctor, you no more regret being stopped than we regret stopping you," spoke Galliard in his best manner, but rapidly. "Ours is a life-and-death mission also; and we mistook your car."

"Be out of your way instantly," Fassler cried, already on a run to his own machine.

So again a swift curve out over the snowy fields and, as by a miracle, through the wire fence a second time without mishap. Onto

the trail then and away. The powerful car seemed to make its own tunnel as through an impenetrable black wall binding it in on either side, yet continually flying on before the gleaming lights.

* * * * * *

Steve Holworth caught the deadening scent of chloroform as he struggled desperately to free a hand—to get his head from beneath the blanket and the weight which smothered him. A fainting sensation seized him. Perhaps it would be better to pretend that he had succumbed to the drug. He lay still, resisting the faintness that crept over him, but consciousness slipped away. The automobile was still rushing on through the night when he regained his senses. His head was safely above the blanket now, yet he was giddily sick. Not at once, but in a little time he realized that his wrists were in handcuffs and his feet were shackled. Now a man beside him in the dark tonneau of the car was leaning forward to speak to the driver. He heard the voice and how instantly he remembered! Red Kaggy's voice—"We've gotta keep to the lower end of the town. There ain't no traffic there."

As the speaker settled back into his place again he was startled—the muffled man beside him was speaking. "Kaggy," said Hol-

worth, "you used to be a square fighter; but chloroform is something else."

"Who carried me off when I couldn't help myself? Mostly unconscious! And where was I when I come to?" Red's answer was as the growl of a bloodhound. Then—"You got your reward. Don't begrudge me mine. I've counted on it a long time. I've passed my nights dreamin' of it."

"Reward? I got no reward for saving your life but your everlasting ill-will. 'Twas all I could do. To try to pull you out of the ditch you had got into would have been but to drag myself in with you. I had either to walk off and let you die, or do just what I did. I've thought it out a thousand times, Red. I wish you could get it out of your head that I wanted a reward or ever got one."

"You got it! Don't lie about it!"

"You and I were boys together, Red. We had our battles, but what of it? Let's put all the cards face up. It's done, and I say to you, on honor, man to man, I asked for no reward, I got none and I wanted none."

"You're a damn liar!" came the answer in tones of hate. "The Starling Bank set your dad up again after Gasby had all but ruined him."

"That had nothing to do with it, Red."

"Don't think I don't know all about it. You kept it pretty quiet, but my own sister was working for a family in Starling at the time. They made no bones about it that the bank got Charlie Aldervale's help, then loaned the money to buy up the Gasby property, and they settled with your old man. And so you went to college and I went to the pen. I ain't forgettin' it!"

For a time Holworth was silent. Could this be the truth as to the Gasby settlement? The Starling Bank initiating and backing the deal that meant so much to him?

"Red," he said, "if what you say is straight, for you've told me something I never heard before, I knew nothing of it. My father got a settlement in the Gasby deal in about the way you say, but he thought,—at least I did, and I still think, that Mr. Aldervale furnished the money."

"He didn't though," Kaggy growled sullenly. "And I could tell you somethin' more about that deal, but I won't. I knew my time would come and it has come. A million times, in fancy, I've heard you splash into the bottom of Hell Yawns, just as I told you that day —and now I'm going to hear it for a fact! I'm goin' to hear it right soon now, an' you may as well know it."

"I supposed that was what you had in mind, Red. Even in the old days, tenacity might have been your middle name. And you had brains, Red! You never used them to your own best interest, but you had them and still have them. It was not square fighting, but you put good brain work into your plan to get me here. But what does it get you? An hour of gratified revenge, then what a price you pay! It is known that you were in Colfax. The dullest detective on the force can guess the rest, and they'll have you in no time. In six months you go to the chair. Take the Starling Bank job. I don't know just how, but it was cleverly done. Yet something you didn't look for happened. It always works out that way. But tell me, how did you stick up the bank and get away with not a soul seeing you? I'm curious to know."

Kaggy remained silent and Holworth did not press his question for, even while he was speaking, his thoughts were busy in other channels. Through the snow and darkness the car plunged on. Presently the speed slackened. The driver half turned toward the tonneau. "How's for another road?" he growled. "We go down these hills like a bobsled going sideways. There'll be a devil of a spill on one of 'em!"

" 'Tain't far now," Red Kaggy said; but the driver did not answer.

Again the car shot forward, into a ditch and out of it, regaining the road as by a miracle.

" 'Tain't far now," repeated Kaggy, turning a scowling face to Holworth. "Not far, but it was far enough the night I tramped from Starling. I first changed to a woman's clothes at the station and when I walked out of the bank I was still a woman so far as anyone would notice. I just went up the stairway beside the bank building to the Odd Fellows' Hall. I could have changed clothes, gone down to the street again and, with my overalls and my tool kit, no one would have looked at me twice. But I was bleeding. They would see that; and I had to stay in a dirty closet all night and all the next day. Then that night I hoofed it every step of the way to the Pastures. No wonder I was done up—just dropped like lead! You know the rest of it, and I'd just as soon you knowed all of it—even that I got the woman's clothes from a mail order house. You'll spill no beans." The man chuckled devilishly.

"I guessed it out somewhat along those lines," spoke Holworth calmly. "It was a clever piece of work, for its kind. I have already said you have brains, Red, but—take

this present enterprise. It doesn't get you anywhere. Don't think I'm worrying about you. I have enough to think of without that. But don't forget that you're headed for a worse place than you're taking me to."

"I ain't belly-achin' about it." Kaggy grunted.

The tone, more than the words, nettled Holworth and he remained silent. Yet it was only to find that he could not center his thoughts upon his situation and the awful death before him, though this was always crowding abruptly into his confused reflections like some sharp, intermittent pain.

Darkness—thick darkness everywhere, save only in the glow of the headlights which swiftly advanced upon the ever receding gloom. Nothing calm—nothing settled—everything seemingly in violent motion, the lights to the fore, the night racing swiftly to close behind them. Steve Holworth had no doubt of the desperate purpose of the man beside him, but as he tried to focus his thoughts upon a way of escape, his mind seemed dull—wholly irresponsive to his will. The stupefying effect of the chloroform was still upon him, he concluded. With an effort he undertook to throw it off.

Death—death—death in Hell Yawns—who

was the driver? Beyond doubt the man was one of the Red leaders. Death—death—an hour away—only an hour—maybe less—Hell Yawns. Oh yes, the driver—he was one of the Reds—suddenly, yes, Drahski! No doubt of it—the reddest of them all—

"I say, Drahski!" He spoke loudly, giving his voice volume above the roar of the speeding car. "Drahski, where do you get off in this deal? I am consigned to Hell Yawns. Red's going to the chair. What do you get? Don't put it all onto Kaggy here! You fellows are accused of such games—letting some other man hold the bag!"

The one addressed made no reply. Perhaps he had not heard. Feeling Kaggy's elbow press violently against his side, Holworth took it as a sign for silence. Again his thoughts —Oh, Philander, where is the two-gallon jug? Strange that the Starling Bank had done that thing—Joe Gasby had never forgotten or forgiven his father's defeat in that deal—not far now—a long way down to the water—death—Hell Yawns—would the folks at home ever know—mother—good old Bob Liscomb—a long way to fall—then the water—death! If Reub Woolford crowded five hundred shares onto the market—sold his stock at such a time—hardly a loyal thing—not far now—

nearer—nearer with each turn of the wheels churning the snow to flurries that scurried away from the headlights—on ahead—death—ever just at the margin of the darkness—death—and beckoning on! Would Elizabeth know—or greatly care? A long drop down to the water—good-bye, all—death! a splash—silence—death!

By degrees more settled thoughts came into his brain. There came steady comprehension of Kaggy's vengeful purposes—Drahski's determination to prove the might of the Red flag to his dupes in Colfax.

In such thinking Holworth's plan was formulated. In the midst of the small dwellings lining the lower Glencoburn road, he would throw himself forward upon the Red driver. Surprised, Drahski might ditch the car. So much the better. His own voice might reach aid. At least there would be a battle. He would make it a noisy one. Kaggy had friends near, but he would not dare reveal his whole purpose—they would never befriend him to the extent of murder. Undoubtedly Kaggy would make speedy use of a gun or a knife. So be it! Holworth braced himself in readiness. A street light—Glencoburn outskirts—very soon now—nearer—Hell Yawns—and death—if—! And then—

Suddenly burying Holworth beneath his own bony frame and with his prisoner's head enfolded in the heavy blanket as before, Kaggy saturated the robe with the drug which had served him at the beginning of this madman's enterprise. With consciousness passing as he struggled, Steve was yet faintly aware of words addressed to him, hearing as from a distance or in a dim dream, "Yes, I have brains, an' they tell me that this is about where you might think of startin' something."

Beyond the Lower Town, Kaggy directed Drahski to turn right. A mile easterly they reached the narrow thoroughfare bordering Plum's Pastures. Cautiously traversing the winding, hilly road, the abductors reached the path leading down past the black fathomless hole among the rocks, and thence into the valley. Wind had swept much of the snow from the hilltops. Going forward with a flashlight, Kaggy instructed Drahski as to the path.

Fifty feet from their ultimate, awful destination, he signaled a halt. "Stop! This is the place—and this is the time I've been waitin' for!"

"Get it over with in a hurry," Drahski spoke sharply. "We gotta move!" He turned bright

headlights to dimmers and stepped stiffly from the car. As quickly as his chilled limbs would let him, he went forward with his flash. He pulled old timbers aside and for a moment looked down into the black shadows of the abyss. "Damned well named!" he muttered. "Get the job done!" he growled, retracing his steps to the car. Impatiently he repeated the words, coming close to his companion, dimly discernible in the lowered lights of the machine. "Get done with it!"

"That's what I say, boss—get it done! An' it's you for it!" As Kaggy spoke, a gun flashed in his hand, its muzzle covering the Red leader menacingly. "You're goin' to have a hand in it, you know. You've helped plan it, and you're goin' to be in it! You've ducked a lot of things, but you don't duck this! You kept out o' sight while I picked up the automobile. I'm wise to every move, an' don't think I ain't. You do the main job now—then we're equals—an' we'll beat it."

"Say, you! You make me laugh! Scared!" There was a sneer in Drahski's voice but good-natured banter, too. "What's come over you? There's a flask of good stuff in the front seat. Better sample it. Come, have a look! It will take two of us to carry him, anyway. Hell! Get it done with!"

"You look; my hands are full," retorted Kaggy, and he motioned toward the tonneau. "And as you was sayin'—get the job done!"

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Rushing swiftly on, Galliard and Fassler found the storm much abated as they advanced. The snow was not so tossed by the wind. The tracks of an automobile which had recently preceded them were quite discernible in the rays of the headlights. Hardly slackening speed for the sickening grades, they came quickly to the first Glencoburn street light. It marked a division of the road. The main thoroughfare bore to the right, and without a pause the long six turned that way.

"All wrong!" Fassler exploded, abruptly. "We've lost the trail!" A half mile had been covered. Swiftly about and back to the forks at the street light. "Yes, here it is! Looks as if they were passing outside the town, but it's their track, and we've lost time!" At furious speed the heavy car rushed forward upon the rediscovered trail.

There had been no traffic through the snow save as wheel prints of the car ahead clearly marked the way. Beyond the low dwellings soon lining the street, there came a sharp turn to the right.

"Slim chance that we'll get 'em! If we

could have just got started earlier!" Fassler was muttering to himself.

Galliard leaned far out of the car. "Easy here—all hills! This winding, narrow road! The very place we've heard Steve tell of! That hole—Hell Yawns—remember? In heaven's name, easy here, Jud! Hark! I heard someone speak!"

Instantly Fassler dimmed the lights. Cautiously he drove forward, all but missing the track which led through a gap in the tumbledown fence and thence into the snowy, rocky woodland.

Galliard ran forward with his flashlight. "Stop!"

Creeping forward, they heard voices and saw the dark outlines of the car they sought, its dim lights reflected upon the snow on the lower ground beyond the crest of the gentle rise.

"Your gun ready? Speed, Jud, and no noise! Don't hesitate to shoot. They won't!" and even as Galliard spoke, the two were hurrying forward, the thin snow muffling their footsteps.

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"Cut your strong-arm stuff, he's coming to! Put up that gun and get hold with me!" Drahski spoke as one used to being obeyed.

Suspiciously, Kaggy joined him but kept his gun in hand, fumbling into the tonneau awkwardly, but aiding in dragging forward the limp body there.

Then—"Now damn you! You will, eh?" and in an instant the Red leader had Kaggy by the throat, choking him nearly senseless. "You'll stack the cards on me, will you? You'll tell me what to do? The only words you're going to have breath to speak will be just what you intend doin' here, an' me no party to it! Are you white-livered or not? I'll give you one second to think it over!"

* * * * * *

"Hands up! Both of you! Here's something else to think of!" The muzzle of a gun was at Drahski's temple. Another covered Red Kaggy.

"I've got 'em both, George! Quick, look to Steve!"

CHAPTER XVI

OUT OF THE NIGHT

"Chloroformed! Shackled hand and foot—typical Red tactics! And, more helpless than a ham-strung horse, they were going to throw him into that Hell-hole!" The burning scorn in Galliard's voice would have lighted wicking. "The wonder is the man's alive! You devils are in great luck that he is!"

Galliard had hastily spread the robe upon the ground. He placed the unconscious Holworth upon it, and noted his returning consciousness. Decisively, swiftly, he turned to the guilty pair. "Shoot them down if they move an inch, Jud. I'll take their guns." In Kaggy's pockets he found the keys for the handcuffs and the shackles. "We can use these," he said, and in a minute he had transferred the hobbles to Drahski.

As he ordered Kaggy to put out his wrists, the man suddenly ducked, gave a great leap, and ran. As he went flying through the dark-

ness, Fassler fired. They heard him fall. The shot made Drahski tractable and he stood quiet as Galliard leaped after the fugitive and found him uninjured. Red declared he would have gotten off had he not stumbled, but it was evident that he had thrown himself down to escape cold lead. In sullen silence he submitted to the handcuffs.

The whole surprise and capture had occupied but a few minutes. Hastening again to Holworth, Galliard found him struggling to a sitting posture, his head in his hands. Instantly his own arm was about the other's shoulders. "Take it easy, old boy," he urged gently.

"What, George—that you? Where are we? I surely felt myself dropped into Hell Yawns!"

"You were well on the way, but what you felt was my dropping you on the robe, I think. You're all right, Steve, and we're looking after your lovely friends, too. Man! there was enough chloroform in this blanket to asphyxiate a horse! It's all right now. Jud's here, too! Pretty soon we're all going to sing 'Hail, Hail, the Gang's All Here'—fine, eh?"

And from Fassler came cheerfully, "Everything's lovely, Steve, and we ain't going to throw these birds into Hell Yawns until you can be up and enjoy it with us." And though

such levity continued for a minute or two, and though it contributed little to the comfort of the captured Reds, it did serve to give outlet to the joyful feelings of the rescuers as well as to ease Holworth's mind away from the fearful nervous shock he had experienced.

Galliard continued to minister to Steve's needs while Fassler herded Drahski and Kaggy into the tonneau of the car and mounted guard on the front seat.

The Red leader's fear of the man beside him was unconcealed. "Keep off! You stay to your own side!" he growled. And to Jud he added: "This crazy Irishman would have had that man into the pit but for me! I blocked him when I saw what he was up to—then you fellows came."

"He's a sneakin' liar! He's a double-crossin' cutthroat!" Kaggy raged; but Galliard approached at this juncture, ironically suggesting that the meeting was about to come to order, and that the "gentleman's remarks" must be heard at another time. "Not," he added, "but what they are to the point and no less truthful than picturesque, but the subject referred to is not under immediate consideration."

The subject for immediate consideration, he briefly stated, was that of getting two cars,

two ruffians and three passengers back to the city. And the curious outcome was that, though no one present realized it and few people elsewhere ever came to know anything about it, the first effective discussion looking to the end of the rubber workers' strike and the Red invasion of Colfax took place that night under a dark and wintry sky and amid the bleak hills of Plum's Pastures.

Jud Fassler was for jailing Kaggy and Drahski at the nearest point—Glencoburn.

"Yes, I could get a story to my paper from Glencoburn," George Galliard added. "What do you say, Steve?"

"George," said Holworth thoughtfully, "I am going to ask a great favor. I know that this night's adventure would make good newspaper copy. But I don't want you to write it. I don't want it told anywhere."

"Why?" asked Galliard in sudden astonishment.

"Chuck the modesty, Steve," Fassler advised speedily.

"It's not that—far from it. Here's the situation. I ask you to listen. I want you two in the back seat to hear this also," and Holworth straightened up in earnest appeal. "You've heard the story of my lugging Red Kaggy from this very spot to the hospital and so to

jail. And he's always had a crazy notion that I did it maliciously and for a reward. Actually, I did the only thing I knew to do. The situation was not in my control. Very lately I've found out that, indirectly, there was a reward given for Kaggy's apprehension. Indirectly, though I did not know it, I shared in that reward. Now bear in mind that Red and I both grew up in Glencoburn. These very pastures were our playground. Red's gang and mine fought many a battle. He naturally saw only a continuation of the old warfare when I found him half dead and dragged him to hostile territory—the Upper Town as we called it. I wasn't looking to damage Red Kaggy; still I had to tell what I knew. But here's a different case. It is largely my own affair. I can keep my mouth shut without becoming a party to the injury of anybody else. Red's on parole; and, if he's willing to cut away from these anarchists and travel straight, why send him back to the pen? From what you have said, I think Kaggy has seen all that he cares to see of the way Drahski and his people work. Either way, the decision is up to him—cut that crowd or stay with them. As for Drahski himself, I cannot so easily advise. I think my idea would be to let him take the first train for Chicago and invite his Col-

fax crew to go along. There will be hard sledding for any that stay in town."

"Seems as if you were overlooking too much," said Fassler. "They fully intended to dump you, handcuffs and all, into that Hell-hole." His tone showed little enthusiasm for Steve's plan.

For a long half minute Galliard was silent. Then he laughed. "By the old tin dipper, Jud," he said, "if it isn't Steve Holworth all over! Instead of doing the thing up as anyone else would do, he must reason out all the kinks and angles—start an argument, if necessary. But I think he's right. There's a job of automobile thievery that is not taken into account, but your friend will get his car back. You can keep him sweet. As for my story, it is already in the discard. What do you say?"

"What have you two got to say?" Fassler demanded, turning to the prisoners in the tonneau.

"I say let me pitch this double-crossin' wop into Hell Yawns right now an' be done with him!" came from Kaggy explosively.

Drahski was silent.

"It looks as if Chicago's climate might be healthier for you," Galliard addressed him.

The Red leader was huddled in his own corner of the tonneau, but he straightened up to

say, "This ain't my party! I didn't get it up and I have nothing to say about it. But I will say I don't mind goin' to Chicago. And if this red-head is a sample of the murderous, brainless hellions you have in your town, I can't go too soon."

"Hear the stuck pig squeal!" cried Kaggy derisively. "All I ask is just half a chance at the dirty double-crosser!"

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Back through the snowy roads the two automobiles and their passengers returned to Colfax. With cheerful alacrity Red Kaggy agreed to keep Drahski under surveillance until he was aboard the afternoon train for Chicago, and then to report the fact to Galliard at the Sherman. "And watch your step, both of you!" the newspaperman cautioned them. "I may have to take this case into my own hands. Holworth's too easy, by a hundred per cent."

Fassler took Steve to his own comfortable bachelor apartment. "Because, old boy," he said, ably seconded by Galliard, "you've got to keep quiet for a day or two, if I have to sit on you. You're just about caved in."

Jud was not greatly mistaken as to Steve's condition, but he was much mistaken as to all else. After a hot bath and food, Holworth so

firmly declared himself quite fit and so earnestly pictured the necessity of avoiding troublesome inquiries that Jud could but let him have his way. He reserved the right to serve as guardian as well as chauffeur, however, and in keeping with that arrangement he went with Steve to the Oldham offices.

It was early afternoon. The wintry skies were still overcast and gray. Slushy snow and dirty water filled the streets. The city wore the look of hard times and worse—as if fallen upon evil days and abandoned to stark misfortune. Few people were astir. From a straggling parade of red-badged marchers came a few hoarse yells as the procession was passing the Oldham plant. The marchers themselves were unpleasantly suggestive of ghouls impatient to lay hold of the goods of the dead of the stricken city.

The gateman reported several inquiries for Steve Holworth. "One gentleman has been here three times. He wished you to call the Chamber of Commerce as soon as you came."

Steve visited the Chamber's offices. Returning to his self-appointed chauffeur in waiting at the curb, he said: "Jud, this town has found its backbone at last. There is to be a meeting of all the Chamber membership at once. We should both be here, but I'd

rather you'd check up on Red Kaggy. Also look into the Big Schooner and the hall and see what may come of our getting the skids under Drahski."

Fassler thought well of the suggestion. He proposed that they both meet Galliard at dinner at the City Club, and the three pool their collective knowledge of developments. Holworth agreed.

Opposition to the Red invasion and to those features of the strike which put the town in terror and barred men from work they wished to do came to a united front in the town of Colfax on this bleak afternoon at the end of February. All important commercial and civic interests of the city were represented in the Chamber of Commerce meeting. Rarely had there been an assemblage of so many of the city's foremost men. There were brief statements by representative merchants and manufacturers, teachers, preachers, lawyers, doctors. Speaking for the Oldham Works, Steve Holworth said, with emphasis, that if loyal operatives could be assured of safety upon the streets, in going to and from their work, all trouble in the Oldham factories could be composed in a few days and without further disorder of any kind.

Representatives of the National and Great

Western plants spoke in similar lines. By degrees all the meeting centered upon the point of safety for the men who wanted to work, and there followed the decision that citizens themselves must be the guarantors of such safety in full measure. Under the plan agreed upon, an able and disinterested man, Rev. David Deerfield, was named chairman of a Committee of Five Hundred to act as citizen-policemen. Immediately more than five hundred enlisted to serve as needed. Bankers, merchants, manufacturers, clerks, mechanics—men of all professions and all callings—gave themselves to the job of policing the streets both day and night, driving their own automobiles to take workers to their jobs, wherever the need arose.

In the meantime Jud Fassler was observing conditions about the Red headquarters. He found the crowd restless. The number of the habitually idle and the lawless type seemed greater, the number of misguided workers adhering to the Red cause seemed less. Everywhere was an atmosphere of impending storm. Going to the hotel to meet Galliard, Jud found the newspaperman in his room and seated with him, coat thrown off and collar open revealing a muscular, bull-like neck, Red Kaggy.

"Sit down," said Galliard. "You will be interested in what our friend has to say."

"Sure! Red, go on," Jud urged in his own breezy, familiar fashion. "I suppose you and Drahski didn't weep on one another's necks at parting."

"You come right to the point, mister! That bird is a two-faced devil. Can you believe it? He tried to patch things up with me again—kidding me along, like he did before. An' believe me, he had some dirty stuff cooked up! I could hardly keep my hands off him. But he knows the answer, and in the end he was plenty willin' to go. I'm goin' to chase out some more of 'em. I'd like to do that much for Steve Holworth. That man's on the level."

"Holworth said you had brains, Kaggy, and now I believe it," declared Galliard, good-humoredly. Kaggy's eyes twinkled but his jaw showed fixed determination. "What help do you want, Red?"

"Give me about five bucks. I've been livin' off those birds, and of course I'm through. Give me a bit to live on till I chase a few of 'em; then I'll try for a job. The strike was just breakin' when I hit town. I'll pay ye back," he added hastily.

They gave Kaggy far more than he asked. He said he would report developments next

day, and went away with a look that boded no good to the Drahski following.

Information as to Red's altered views pleased Steve Holworth more than he undertook to express; but other news that Galliard imparted as the three sat at dinner was of no such gratifying character. In effect it was that, with Oldham stock on the market at ridiculously low figures, Henry Gasby had bought right and left. Joe Gasby had quietly bought some hundreds of shares offered privately by worried holders.

"That's the Gasby idea of the sweet thing to do in such a set of circumstances," Jud Fassler observed with more acidity than was often heard in Jud Fassler's voice.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MARVELOUS ECHO

Directly its purposes were known, the Committee of Five Hundred actually numbered nearly one thousand men of Colfax. Long before daylight of the bleak, wintry mornings, its members were patrolling the streets. All were heavily armed. In the downtown districts men walked the beats assigned them. With the aid of automobiles, others covered the factory districts and outlying sections. There were numerous conflicts with strikers, some of a serious character. Pavements were strewn with sharp, flat-headed nails by Red adherents and their sympathizers. Rocks were thrown. A few ineffectual shots were fired. Arrests followed, however, and steadily the ranks of the Red recruits dwindled. Directly the decent workmen found it safe to be out again, they added greatly to their own protection by going to and from their places in groups of four or five or even a score, and all were armed.

No one can more than guess the true measure of all that Red Kaggy personally accomplished, but it was long remembered that his work was of first importance. He went among the strikers everywhere. He had been known as a faithful lieutenant of Drahski and others in the forefront of the Red invaders. But now he raised his voice in bold opposition. And when to the rank and file he said, "Look out for that bunch. They've been making us the goats," some others began to make reckonings of their own. Their findings confirmed the views Kaggy fearlessly voiced. Many remained away from the meetings and failed to appear in the daily parades. The Red army's ranks grew thinner.

The collapse of the strike did not come immediately but it did come completely, and practically in a single day. Unquestionably Red Kaggy was a factor in precipitating the crash. Quietly urged by him and by others who had come to his way of thinking, a closed meeting of all who had paid I. W. W. membership dues was arranged. An accounting was to be demanded. Much money, probably fifteen thousand dollars, had been collected by Red agents. What benefits were to accrue to men now out of work and out of funds?

Fast on the heels of Drahski, and probably

advised by him, several of the most active Red leaders had quietly left the city behind them. Of the half dozen who remained, all agreed to attend the meeting. At the hour of assembly the hall was filled. An atmosphere of rankling distrust pervaded all the place. On every side were glum, questioning, disgruntled men. Glib Goldsol, a local agitator, an early and enthusiastic booster for the Red invaders, mounted the platform to preside. At once he plunged into a fiery talk incorporating all the Red doctrine at his command. Loudly he called for renewed allegiance to the great cause. Then he called for a report of the treasurer. There came no response whatever. Again he demanded a financial report. From one part of the hall and another came mocking laughter, but nothing more.

"There was to be a Finance Committee to receive all funds," the speaker cried, and his tone showed sharp irritation. "Is there a member of that committee present?"

And still there was no response. Save for a jeer and laugh, the hall was silent.

Then Red Kaggy gave a derisive shout. "Skinned!" he yelled. "Goats! All of us! A man can be excused for bein' a sucker once, but if he keeps on bein' one, he's just a plain

damn fool! Come on, join up! Membership is two bucks!"

Two men sprang at Kaggy to silence him, but all the meeting was now an inflamed bedlam of loud questions, jeers and harsh-voiced imprecations. In the midst of it all, a man hurried to the stage, loudly calling for order. He was the owner of the hall. Directly he could make himself heard he demanded the payment of rent, long overdue. No attention was given him. "I demand a meeting of those responsible for the rent!" he shouted.

"Go jump off the dock!" one man loudly advised him.

"What's the matter with your holding a little bag of your own?" another asked.

From a score of others came ribald advice and comment; but soon the crowd was leaving the hall, and although the town of Colfax was not yet aware of the fact, the rubber workers' strike was ended.

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Steve Holworth had been inclined to question the full import of George Galliard's information that the Gasbys had acquired large holdings of Oldham stock. He had no doubt that Henry Gasby had eagerly seized the opportunity to put such property into his strong box at half price, but he could not picture the

narrow, unprincipled, small-town financier asking a place in a directorate composed of such men as Mr. Oldham and Winthrop Ensign, much less gaining it.

It was fortunate, perhaps, that the whole unhappy truth came to Holworth only in a succession of developments. For weeks he was so busy in getting the Oldham Works back into smooth and satisfactory operation that he had time to think of little else. Reub Woolford had so far lost standing with the other executives and his usefulness in the factory organization was so impaired that, by common consent, most of his duties fell to his assistant, and Steve freely shouldered all that came to him. He saw Joe Gasby occasionally, but the latter's "efficiency" work had been suspended and he little knew or cared what the man was doing.

Then the first blow fell.

Mr. Oldham had never fully recovered from shock and injury due to the strike, yet he was daily at his office. One day in June he called Holworth to his desk. His greeting was always pleasant but today there was a cloud upon his face.

"I hope," he said kindly, "that you are going to be able to tell me that you can work in harmony with Gasby. The truth is, I think of

going away for a time. My health is not good. In this case, I want Gasby's assistance in the management, but want you to have general superintendence of the factory, under Woolford. And for that matter, Reub is not well and he will be away more or less. This will bring you into direct contact with Gasby, and I'm aware that you're not fond of each other."

"Not very," Steve smiled; "but under such circumstances, Mr. Oldham, I think we can avoid serious friction."

"That's fair, Steve—very fair. I'm glad you don't take the plan unkindly. I might say, in confidence, that Henry Gasby is now one of our large stockholders. Reub Woolford wants to be relieved, and if he should resign when I return, as he probably will, the elder Mr. Gasby will take his place on the board."

With the self-control he had long since learned to value, Steve repressed his dislike of the proposed arrangement. Remembering that a single director is not an entire board, he said cheerfully: "I'm glad you feel that you can get away, Mr. Oldham. I hope a long rest will do you a world of good. The organization is working smoothly now, and we will keep it so."

Within the week Mr. and Mrs. Oldham and their daughter—the latter no longer young, but handsome in an austere and chilling way—were sailing for an old-world cruise. They had in view, further, a considerable stay in France and Switzerland.

In the president's absence, Reub Woolford came to the plant with no regularity and seldom remained for more than an hour or two. He confided to Holworth his intention to resign and, from what he said and from common report elsewhere, Steve was of the opinion that the resignation would be promptly accepted. The superintendent's timidity during the trying weeks of the strike, with especial reference to the Oldham stock he held, had been productive of caustic criticism.

Nevertheless, Woolford's prospective resignation brought Holworth into personal contact with Joe Gasby. For the time he met the situation largely by confining to written and dictated notes the communications which must pass from his desk to that of the assistant manager. Apparently Gasby approved the plan, and his written communications to the assistant superintendent were as coldly formal as if he addressed a total stranger. Often, however, his letters had about them a

certain dictatorial air which tried Steve's temper sorely. Still, as President Oldham's policies were adhered to and Gasby himself seldom entered the factory proper or sought to give orders except through regular channels, he contented himself with a glance at the date he had blue-penciled on the calendar—the date of the president's homecoming.

Loss of production during the strike and long weeks required for effective reorganization of the factory had kept the Oldham Works, and Holworth in particular, very busy far into the summer. By September conditions were becoming normal. The plant closed for Labor Day, and with bright anticipations of a few hours' recreation, Steve accepted the invitation of Mr. and Mrs. Ensign for an over-the-holiday party at Spring Lake, where the Ensigns had a large though unpretentious summer place. He was none the happier to find Joe Gasby one of the party, but in the knowledge that Julia Shaffer would be present, bringing her guest, Elizabeth Aldervale, it was not hard to put the Gasbys out of mind. Yet bright thoughts may change color, and it was not at all a simple matter to keep Joe Gasby from one's reflections when one found him so constantly attentive to Miss Shaffer's guest.

Come to womanhood, Elizabeth Aldervale was all that her girlhood's winsome qualities had promised. She was attractive of face and figure and yet too reserved to make friends easily. Her manner, sometimes spoken of as imperious, was rather patrician; but even those who attributed certain "airs" to her were obliged to admit that they became her mightily. To those who knew her well, as Steve Holworth, for example, she was the same quiet, wonderful girl she had always been, only more wonderful—possibly more distant but certainly more wonderful, infinitely more superior.

It distressed Holworth and he felt a distrust he could not well put into words to observe that Elizabeth Aldervale was quite constantly the object of Joe Gasby's marked attentions. His blood boiled as he saw the sleek-haired, smooth and oily engineer of efficiency hourly hovering about her like a sinister black fly. With all the patience and fortitude he could summon, he bore the situation in silence. And he, too, was attentive to Elizabeth; and though he found no ground for complaint that she was not in every way her old self toward him, he returned from his holiday desperately unhappy and miserable.

Fred Kinney, former night superintendent,

was the type of man who gave neither more time nor more thought to his work than were covered by the hours of his period on duty. And he showed no resentment in seeing a younger man advanced while he remained in his old place. To the contrary, he was at once interested in helping Steve Holworth in every way. So it had fallen out that he became Steve's right hand lieutenant in the daylight work of the superintendent's office. Still Kinney must have his vacation as usual, and Steve arranged to give him the last half of September. Prompt to the hour, October first, Mr. Kinney returned. "You must give yourself a holiday, Steve," he urged. "The country was never finer. Once we get into fall production, you'll not be willing to go."

"I've been thinking of it," Steve replied. "I'm going back to the home town for a few days."

He had seen little of Glencoburn in recent time. Save for visiting his own people and seeing Elizabeth Aldervale, he had had no marked inclination in that direction. But now he wished very much to go. He did not so much as pretend to himself that he had especially in mind seeing either his parents or his brother; but at the earliest date possible he was again at the old home.

Through Jud Fassler, the inner circle of Glencoburn had received some report of Steve's abduction by the Reds and the narrow margin by which he escaped death in the depths of Hell Yawns. Personally, Steve avoided the topic, but as now he called upon Elizabeth she frankly asked him concerning the adventure. In praise of Fassler and Galliard he was glad to tell her the story.

"I haven't seen that terrible spot for years. I think I never did venture quite to the mouth of it," she said. And so it came about that they arranged to give part of one day of Holworth's brief vacation to visiting the old playground.

In autumn foliage, all the Plum's Pastures region was a scene of wild beauty. To Holworth the rocky, tree-decked hillsides and the deep valleys had never been half so filled with color and romance. Here were the very atmosphere and the constant suggestion of scores of old memories, a few of them tragic, most of them sweetly pleasant, but none in any degree comparable to the present visit.

They were seated upon the rocks above the black abyss. They had been looking down into the pit, and to one it was bountiful compensation for all the distress and danger of that

wild night's experience to hear Elizabeth Aldervale say:

"And you in chains, Steve—the horror of it! Oh, Steve!" and her hand momentarily rested upon his own.

He smiled like a boy.

" 'She loved me for the dangers I had passed;
And I loved her that she did pity them,' "

he quoted. He had meant to speak lightly but an earnestness crept into his voice. His face reflected deeper emotion.

"Hardly valid reasons, though Othello made them so," said Elizabeth musingly.

"Oh, I have countless more reasons," Steve smiled. "Reasons beyond measure! By the way, let's hear the marvelous echo again," he suggested. He was thoughtful as they walked on to Balance Rock to which came back each clearly spoken word sent over the dim valley below.

"You must know," he said, "that this echo is notable for many things. It is remarkably acute and clear, of course, but I assure you it is also very truthful. Its declarations are worthy of the utmost respect. Also it is prophetic. I have always believed in it. Though I have never found Philander Plum's two-gallon jug, I still pin all faith to the echo's answers."

"I knew the echo of old," she said. "It is impressive—almost as if a voice came out of the unknown."

"And truthful and prophetic," he persisted.

There was such eager earnestness in his tone, she regarded him curiously.

"Listen," he urged; and across the rock-bound valley went his voice, not loudly but in sufficient volume to gain response—

"Good, faithful echo, tell me truly, if in deepest love and sincerity I place at the feet of one beside me all I am or have, and all I shall ever be or have, and all my love, may I hope she will accept them?"

Faithfully the echo spoke—"She will accept them."

Looking into Elizabeth's eyes, Steve saw there a smile—and more. Rapturously he put his arms about her. Presently, when she was able to disengage herself, though an encircling arm still held her close, she said gently, "But Steve, you must let me amend the echo's answer."

"Not so! It's a perfectly good answer," he said gaily.

"But I insist!" she whispered. "Let us remember it thus—'She will accept them—with deep and endless love'."

Later, as they came to the Aldervale home,

Steve said, boyishly, "Now let Uncle Billy Fee say his worst! I can afford to bear all slings and arrows from that source, evermore."

"I shall keep Uncle Billy in ignorance—for a time at least, in punishment of his many sins," said Elizabeth gaily, and added earnestly: "If he were to breathe one word to your disparagement now, Steve dear—but he shall not know, until I myself shall tell him."

In Colfax again, Holworth called on Jud Fassler. "Jud," said he, "do you want to sell me one of those speedy sixes? I've been back to Glencoburn for a few days. The old folks are getting along in years. With a good car I should be able to run over there frequently."

"Just what you want, right on the sales floor!" exclaimed Fassler with characteristic enthusiasm; and Steve bought the car.

As an indirect consequence of Holworth's purchase, Uncle Billy Fee unwittingly but none the less certainly disgraced himself in the eyes of Miss Aldervale. It was the day after the new automobile had made its first appearance at the Aldervale home. The faithful gardener was in the driveway most carefully dusting the Aldervale Packard as Elizabeth appeared in search of belated

dahlias. "How do you like Steve Holworth's new car, Uncle Billy?" she asked.

"Why, yes," said the gardener, straightening up from his work and regarding her thoughtfully. "I saw the thing. Them spindly jack rabbits ain't much to look at. But I s'pose it may do—it may do for Stephen."

Quite possibly it was in consequence of such most ill-timed observations that Miss Aldervale whimsically, yet very earnestly, renewed her determination that Uncle Billy should remain in ignorance of recent developments relating to Mr. Holworth and herself. And when the wedding took place, a quiet affair of the Christmas season, Billy Fee was given a holiday and considerable care was taken in other directions, also, to keep him unenlightened as to that important event.

CHAPTER XVIII

WILLIAM KAGGY, PLUMBER

The business year of the Oldham Company closed October thirty-first. In mid-December came the annual meeting of the stockholders. Mr. Oldham was expected to return from abroad in season to prepare the president's report upon the year's work. This was a matter in which he had ever taken such painstaking pride and pleasure that surprise and concern were manifest among his associates when an early November letter announced his intention to extend his absence indefinitely. Accepting medical advice, he would spend the winter in Italy.

Fenton Thatcher, vice-president, was not active in the Oldham organization. He was best known as president of the Home Insurance Company. His experience in manufacturing was limited and it was with no liking for the task that he prepared to preside over the yearly Oldham meeting. Naturally, he

consulted at length with Joseph Gasby, acting general manager, and it was largely Gasby's version of the strike and its effect upon the work of the year which went into the annual report. Due to the strike, the year's business had shown no profit. The report commented, however, upon the advance the company had made in promoting efficiency in all departments. It was silent upon the greater work (chiefly Steve Holworth's) by which factory and labor conditions had been improved, and large economies effected by the installation of electrical power units, doing away with much cumbersome and costly belt-driven shafting.

Here was enough to have given Steve Holworth a few gloomy hours at least, but more was to come. The stockholders re-elected four of the former directors and, the resignation of Reuben Woolford being accepted, Henry Gasby was elected to his place on the board. All officers were re-elected: Mr. Oldham, president; Fenton Thatcher, vice-president; Edward Fobes, secretary and treasurer. Notwithstanding that the office of president had hitherto carried with it the responsibilities of general management, Joe Gasby was officially given the general manager's title and duties; and it was against poorly veiled protest which Henry Gasby pre-

sented that Stephen Holworth was named to the rank and duties of general superintedent.

To himself and to a few intimate friends, Holworth declared that, though he did not like Joe Gasby, he meant to work with him without unnecessary friction. However, he admitted that the advancement of Gasby influence and Gasby ideas in the Oldham Company considerably modified the high satisfaction he might otherwise have had in the promotion which had come to him.

Winthrop Ensign, who for many years had been a director of the Oldham Works and was, of course, re-elected, was not long in finding out that Steve Holworth was not as happy as he had thought to see him. Likewise, by a little discreet questioning he learned the reason. To Holworth he refrained from comment other than to suggest that, though men may not be mutually congenial socially, industrially, good teamwork between them should be possible. Undoubtedly, too, these were his sincere views. They also reflected the opinion of the aged secretary and treasurer, who was, however, hardly more than a figurehead in Oldham operations.

Nevertheless, in confidences exchanged by Mr. Ensign and Mr. Fobes, regret was expressed that, in the present distribution of

Oldham stock, control lay with the Oldham and Gasby interests. They had no fear as to what Mr. Oldham might do personally; but if he were to yield to Gasby influence and give his support in that direction, the outcome might be unfortunate. Their peace of mind was not increased by their knowledge that the elder Gasby was also to spend the winter in Italy.

A normal flow of business had kept the Oldham rubber factories fairly active through the late fall; but competition had increased and the greater activity of the winter developed slowly. In this condition, Steve Holworth was able to build up his factory organization more carefully than he could have done otherwise. Old influences of the strike were still to be discovered. Sabotage was the resort of the unscrupulous whose weak minds had been permanently poisoned by Red doctrine, and it was not an easy matter to sort out this element. Here was a situation requiring constant vigilance—only one of many things which made long and busy days.

For a time Steve had lost sight of Red Kaggy. In the closing days of the strike, he heard of Red's activity against the invaders and later, as the whole story of Kaggy's work

and influence came to him, he was deeply impressed by the man's sturdy character and doubly glad he had been content to square the old account between them as he had done.

Going to Jud Fassler one day, Steve said: "What can we do for my friend from Glencoburn? If Red were not too proud to accept anything from me, I could place him in line for training and a good job. He's clever and, with a little direction, his brains will get him somewhere."

Fassler promptly agreed that Kaggy certainly would accept nothing from Holworth. He proposed, however, to get in touch with the man and sense out his situation and his attitude toward such a proposal as Steve had in view. Later he reported that Red had been employed as a laborer on a road-building job; but with that work finished for the season, he was now looking for employment. Because of his activities during the strike, he did not take kindly to the rubber factories as a place for himself.

"Jud," said Holworth, "Red learned the plumbing trade long ago. There's a 'For Sale' sign on a little plumbing shop on Raleigh Street. Find out if Red wouldn't like to buy the place. He need not know that I am in on

it, but if a few hundred dollars will swing the deal, I'll get Winthrop Ensign to loan him the money. I'll put my name on the note with him, but he need not know that."

"Just what the man needs!" declared Fassler. "I would have had him in my own shop, but he hates to take orders. On a job where the head-work is his own, he will work night and day and call it play."

And thus it was that the sign on the little shop in Raleigh Street was changed to read: "William Kaggy, General Plumbing. Repairs a Specialty." And events proved that Jud Fassler was right in his estimate of the man. Red Kaggy was happy in his work. But one day a thing happened which disturbed his peace of mind for a time. He called at the bank to make a payment on his note. The teller at the loan window received his money and endorsed the amount upon the paper.

"How much have I got to pay yet?" Kaggy asked.

Thoughtlessly the clerk allowed him to see the amounts previously recorded. Kaggy flushed redder than his own red hair. The name of Stephen Holworth would not have astonished him so much had he seen it in flaming letters in the sky.

"What does that mean?" he demanded, and

his red forefinger pointed to Holworth's signature.

"Nothing at all," grinned the teller, " if you pay the note."

"But he has to pay it if I don't?"

There was no help for it now, and the teller nodded yes.

"Well, I'll be cussed!" said Red Kaggy.

He went to Jud Fassler. After some wholly ineffectual attempts at evasion, Jud told all the truth.

"I'll be damned!" said Red Kaggy with emphasis.

* * * * * *

Tom Herbert, general sales manager of the Oldham Company, was rated as one of the very good men of the business. Holworth had come to know him well and valued him as a good salesman and a "square shooter." The two were having dinner together at the City Club on a night in January when Herbert began:

"You and I seem to have had a gentleman's agreement not to talk shop much, outside the office; but I want to talk shop tonight. I don't know whether your factory organization is aware of what we, on the sales line, are bound to see, but—it's this man Gasby. He has shot the sales morale to bits. He'd rather

see a ream of crazy reports than ten solid reams of orders! He wants salesmen to spend one day a week trying to sell the stuff and five days a week snooping around to find out and report every insignificant bit of tommy-rot detrimental to the credit of a customer. He has queered more good things and got less out of it than any man since Adam. I get word today that we've lost Hoard & Wesley, the best tire account in Indiana. And why? Because Gasby personally wrote letters reflecting on their credit and saying we were looking to make new connections all through the state. It was a sure thing the letters would get back to them, and they showed them to our own men. Can you beat it?"

"What's the ultimate objective?" asked Holworth quietly.

"Heaven knows!" Herbert answered wearily. "May I ask you, man to man, isn't it true that he has been monkeying with the compounds—using more low-grade and more reclaimed rubber than Oldham ever uses? You in the factory know that."

"He has changed some formulas. I think the laboratory worked with him and approved them. The millroom runs the stock, but it is not our place to question the compound."

"Laboratory approval—not any!" Herbert

growled. "Gasby has the chemists scared sick, and he's shooting the product to pieces so fast that our competitors hold jollification meetings twice a day. And on top of putting out stuff that's a disgrace to the Oldham name, he has the advertising department writing the rottenest lot of bunk that ever sickened a salesman on the firing line. Where are we going to get off? That's what I want to know!"

"The factory's getting into heavy production. Goods are moving out in about the greatest volume we've ever shipped. You must be selling the stuff," said Holworth reassuringly.

"Wait till it starts coming back!" snorted Herbert contemptuously. "Wait till a bit of hot weather begins to shoot up the tires you're turning out right now! They'll be popping like firecrackers on the Fourth of July!"

With the coming of midsummer it was evident that production and sales for the first half of the year had exceeded all prior Oldham records. Yet earnings were slight. Studying a report prepared only for the directors, but which Winthrop Ensign placed in his hands, Holworth saw that manufacturing costs were lower than usual. In an analysis he was able to take some credit to himself for

improved factory operations, but he also confirmed his earlier estimate that vastly more low-grade and medium rubbers, and much less of the better grades, had been used than was at all in line with Oldham's established qualities. Prices to the trade had been cut, however.

Quite as Tom Herbert had predicted, goods were being returned from all quarters. By August the letters of consumers, dealers and distributors made the mails sizzle. Worried and alarmed, old Edward Fobes sent for Steve Holworth. It is unnecessary to report their interview at length. The substance of it was that Mr. Fobes "greatly feared" the factory had been careless in manufacturing and negligent as to inspections. He was of the opinion that goods had been over-cured, which is to say, heated for too great a time, or at too high a temperature, in the process of vulcanization.

It was so evident that Mr. Fobes had found these "fears" in statements made to him by Joe Gasby that Holworth said boldly: "It is perfectly true that we have turned out some rotten stuff; but the trouble lies in the front office—not in the factory. The product will be no better than the material we are given to put into it."

At various times it was apparent that Gasby was openly blaming the factory—which meant Steve Holworth—for the serious conditions which had arisen. There was a heavy money loss on every car of returned merchandise, but the loss to the Oldham name was even greater. To Gasby himself, as the two debated the matter, Steve calmly reiterated the flat statement he had made to Mr. Fobes.

In answer Gasby sneered: "Our formulas compare very well with those of our competitors. If their stuff stands up, so would ours, if factory operations were right."

Checking the laboratory's view of the matter, Holworth gained, in confidence, a story of constant interference by the general manager. He wanted cheap materials, and even long-standing stock formulas had been altered upon his demand.

In September came the yearly conference of the sales forces. About fifty branch managers and other sales representatives were in attendance. Main office managers were also present, including Holworth as chief of the manufacturing division. Sales Manager Tom Herbert presided.

As various speakers stressed difficulties which failure of the product had caused,

General Manager Gasby addressed the meeting. He acknowledged some little trouble with the product in recent months, though he intimated also that sharp competition had made manufacturing economies necessary. He added:

"I hope you will find no trouble with future quality, but don't think you won't have to work. Any man can sell gold dollars for ninety cents. We want the other kind of salesmen. Our qualities will be worth the price asked.

"As to past trouble, I may mention that Mr. Holworth, along with the rest of us, has no doubt gained a great deal in the year's experience. There is no better teacher. For a little story to the point, I can look back to college days. Some of us had very little money, and Holworth got a chance occasionally to serve as waiter. If he didn't drop the dishes in the ladies' laps, he sometimes tripped and spread them over the floor, himself on top of them. But of course he was not an experienced waiter. He would have done better in time."

Mr. Gasby smiled broadly. Yet he hardly succeeded in hiding the look of malicious satisfaction his eyes expressed.

Tom Herbert got to his feet slowly, flushed

and embarrassed. "The G. M. hands Mr. Holworth a hot one," he said, looking to cover Gasby's offensive words with a disarming smile. "Of course, we are aware it is all a joke. We know Steve Holworth is a quality man, and that the Oldham factory has never been in better hands; and perhaps he has something to say to us."

"The story Mr. Gasby told you is absolutely true. He refers to a certain painful occasion, at least," spoke Holworth slowly, and he smiled as if it little mattered. "Also, Mr. Gasby emphasized the worth of experience as a teacher. He is right. But if the waiter who fell headlong persisted in believing that it could be done as a regular thing and at a profit, it would be reasonable to presume that the lesson had not penetrated. The one remedy for error is prompt correction and, for ourselves, I hope I am right in saying that mistakes are in process of correction, and that in future you will not fail to find the old-time Oldham quality in Oldham products."

Joe Gasby made a mental note that there was no reason why the superintendent's office should be represented in a sales meeting and that it should not be the case in future.

CHAPTER XIX

AN OLD SECRET DISCLOSED

The Oldhams returned from Europe in November. Though forewarned that Mr. Oldham's health had not improved, friends in Colfax were little prepared to see in the man they greeted only the frail shadow of his former self. But it was pleasant to be home again, Mr. Oldham said hopefully, and he believed he would be the better for having his old work to engage his time. After only one day of rest, he went to the Oldham offices. Throughout his long absence he had asked for and received only brief and infrequent reports covering operations of the Oldham Company. He was the more eager, therefore, to be at his desk. With customary kindliness he greeted old associates and employes. Later, he had a long conference with Joe Gasby. To Steve Holworth he said subsequently: "I really should have been here long ago. I am stronger than I had thought. I

shall want to have a considerable talk with you tomorrow."

But as happens all too frequently, the tomorrow he looked for never came. After dinner at his home, Mr. Oldham met a few callers. Then with his daughter, Miss Mary Oldham, who since his illness had assisted him in matters of business, he examined the six-months statement of the rubber company's operations. This, together with information he had gathered at the plant, undoubtedly caused him much anxiety. Whether this hastened his end can be no more than surmise; but Henry Oldham retired for the night and his heart ceased beating as he slept.

In business circles there was almost immediate speculation as to the future presidency of the Oldham Company. Gossip in general agreed that Joseph Gasby would be the man. The names of Vice-President Fenton Thatcher, Winthrop Ensign and Stephen Holworth were also mentioned. In one of the financial journals appeared the statement that Oldham and Gasby interests would control the election. This was accompanied by the further information that, under the recent Gasby management, the Oldham Company had made substantial progress and,

after ironing out manufacturing troubles traceable to the rubber workers' strike, would be in a way to show greatly increased volume and earnings.

Steve Holworth easily saw here the hand of Joseph Gasby, placing the blame for recent failures on the factory and the strike of the previous year. Yet he knew the losses of the first six months were being repeated, if not increased. To obtain greater sales volume Gasby had cut prices severely and although he was not constantly altering formulas as in an earlier time, he still insisted upon the use of substitutes and low-grade stocks.

Tom Herbert had boldly faced him. "Oldham quality has become a joke," the sales manager declared.

"Oldham quality is all the public needs or wants, and then some! Volume is the thing I require of you! Sell the goods!" Gasby retorted hotly.

"So they may be shipped back?" returned Herbert, recklessly; and he was not surprised when in the office mail next day he found the general manager's request for his resignation.

Winthrop Ensign, Edward Fobes and Fenton Thatcher met to discuss the Oldham situation. The secretary-treasurer made it

definitely known that the Oldham family holdings, now in the hands of Miss Oldham, combined with the Gasby interest would certainly control the forthcoming annual meeting.

"Personally, I was for young Gasby through most of the year," said Mr. Fobes regretfully, "but I was wrong. He had the wool pulled over my eyes, and even poor Henry Oldham died in the belief that Gasby was handicapped by adverse factory conditions and that his only mistake was in trying to make up for this by slighting quality to some extent."

"But, even if among us we could persuade Miss Oldham to vote her stock with ours, whom are you going to have as president? I am content to be vice-president, and my experience fits me for nothing more, in any case." This from Mr. Thatcher.

"Why, sir, we are going to make Steve Holworth president, and we are going to put the management into his hands, sir!" and Winthrop Ensign brought his fist down as he spoke.

"I wish it might be done," said Mr. Fobes feebly, hopelessly. "I'll try what I can do in a talk with Miss Oldham."

From some source, perhaps from some outspoken words of Winthrop Ensign, the

newspapers obtained just enough information to print a scare-head story to the effect that a fight for control of the Oldham Company was on, and that Joseph Gasby was slated for the presidency. On the other hand the minority faction hoped to make Stephen Holworth president and restore the general management to the president's office, as in former time. Out of this publicity there arose an interesting development of which very few people were ever aware.

Red Kaggy called upon Jud Fassler at the latter's office. He asked to know the "inside dope" about Holworth's chances of becoming the Oldham Company's president. Jud told him what he knew—scarcely more than the newspapers had printed.

"Will you go with me to see Steve?" Red asked. "I got something to tell him; but it better be at his house or anyhow not at the Works."

Jud proposed his office as a meeting-place and at the appointed time Holworth was there. He had seen Kaggy occasionally but the latter was shy and Steve had made no attempt to approach him in conversation. Now he greeted the man easily and pleasantly, as he might have shaken hands with any other old acquaintance from Glencoburn. Red had

been nervous and constrained but Steve's manner soon relieved his embarrassment, and he said:

"I'm glad to think I can show you that I appreciate what you've done for me. Maybe you'll recollect that I said to you once that there was more to the deal about Gasby refusing the building your dad built for him than I was telling at the time."

"Yes, that was the night—the night of our party," said Holworth with a quiet smile.

"Yeah—the party—" said Kaggy, smiling nervously. "That was the time. Now I want you to now what I meant. The truth is that the reason your folks couldn't find your copy of the building specifications was because Gasby had 'em. He got Grouchy Garlic to bring them to his office and he gave up ten bucks for 'em and he kept 'em. He told Grouch that they were his own. As soon as I heard the yarn, I knew better. Well, now you're goin' to ask me, what good is it to spill the thing at this late day? And I'll tell you. You let young Gasby know what you know, and mention that it might be healthy for him not to block any road you may fancy around the Oldham Works. You know and I know they're crooked—all of 'em! It's queer how long it takes this town to get wise."

For a time Holworth was at a loss to answer. He knew that in Red's mind the thing he proposed was a legitimate weapon of war. At last: "It is a matter of satisfaction to me, Red, to know what you have told us; but I don't think I would use the information in the way you suggest. The thing you report had never occurred to me. I can't doubt the truth of it; but in the long run Gasby was the loser. In the way it all turned out, the business growth of the town gave my father more profit in the property than he would have had in the building job. That is one reason why I wanted to do a bit for you; for, referring to the night of—our party—again, you were right in saying that the Starling Bank planned the deal to buy the block and loaned the money to finance it. But in the present instance—no, Red, I couldn't use the lever you offer me; but I do appreciate your confidence."

Kaggy was plainly disappointed, but he left Fassler's establishment as a man who had put down a chafing burden.

Edward Fobes reported to Messrs. Ensign and Thatcher the result of his talk with Miss Mary Oldham as to the voting of the stock in her control at the Oldham annual meeting. He was discouraged and cross. "She is not only for Gasby, but she has already given

him her proxy. She will not attend the meeting. Her father thought well of Joe Gasby and placed great confidence in the young man's modern views. And that is enough for her, and that's her answer," said Mr. Fobes, sighing deeply. "In effect, she says she is perfectly capable of doing her own thinking."

"What proxies can we get for our own needs?" questioned Mr. Ensign, reflectively.

"Man," said Edward Fobes impressively, "if you get them all, you're still whipped. Combined, the Oldham and Gasby stock is better than fifty per cent of the total."

"Let 'em ride to the finish!" suggested Fenton Thatcher. "Gasby will wreck the works in two years, but in the meantime the open market will buy our stock."

"At a loss of a million dollars among us! No, by gravy! I'm going to fight!" declared Winthrop Ensign. "We will get what proxies we can. We will make a showing that will at least command respect."

"I'd be lost without the Oldham Works. I've been there thirty years," spoke Mr. Fobes helplessly. "You don't think they'll ditch me, do you, Winthrop, for riding along with you two? Mary Oldham might not, but Gasby would, eventually. He'd be too shrewd to do it in this meeting."

"You just sit tight, Edward; I'm going to see Mary Oldham myself."

And true to this resolution, the banker called at the Oldham home. The results he achieved were practically identical with those reached by Mr. Fobes in his earlier call. Miss Oldham was in no way disagreeable, but she was firm—very firm. Indeed, it may be truthfully stated that firmness was highly characteristic of Henry Oldham's daughter. She did say she would be willing and even glad to have a talk with Stephen Holworth as to the operation of the plant, but not with reference to the presidency of the company.

Urged by Mr. Ensign, Holworth consented to call on Miss Oldham, though he insisted that, for himself, he would rather resign at once. He had met Miss Oldham occasionally in time past, and as he called now, she made him very welcome. Steve was fairly surprised to find how much the lady had learned of the company since her father's illness had brought business matters into her life. She asked many questions. Holworth answered plainly but, as to himself, modestly. He stated bare facts. In response to her inquiry, he said, no, he would not be content to continue as general superintendent with Mr. Gasby as general manager, even if the latter

desired such arrangement, which he assuredly did not.

"My father had a high regard for you, Mr. Holworth," said Miss Oldham, as he was leaving. "He liked Mr. Gasby also, and had much faith in his present-day ideas as to every kind of manufacturing. My father realized that the Oldham Works required new blood. We often talked of it; and now that I must think for the Oldham interests, the fact impresses me the more. I should not have ventured to speak thus far, but I think it only fair to you. And yet I am obliged to say frankly that I have given my proxy to Henry Gasby and I shall not recall it."

* * * * * *

Jud Fassler told his stenographer no more than that he would be out of town for a day; but his ticket read Chicago. He met and talked with George Galliard. What this might have to do with his idea of looking to sell a new twin-six to Miss Mary Oldham does not readily appear; but the event proved not only that George Galliard liked the idea, but strongly recommended it. Also, he counseled Jud at much length as to all that he should do and say during the course of such an interview.

Mr. Fassler obtained an appointment with

Miss Oldham and drove a beautiful twin-six to her home. They talked of cars—and other things. Quite casually, Jud turned conversation to the rubber workers' strike, Steve Holworth, Glencoburn, the two Gasbys, Red Kaggy. He said little but he did not mince words. He pictured Kaggy as a character worth knowing, suggesting also that he deserved the encouragement of Miss Oldham's patronage.

Miss Oldham appeared quietly interested, but how vastly she was concerned was not shown until after Fassler's leave-taking. She gave time to thought, and later of the same day Red Kaggy was called to the Oldham home to attend to some plumbing. Miss Oldham talked with the man, who said Yes, he was the Red Kaggy who came from Glencoburn. Sure, he knew everybody in that town, he guessed. Yes, he knew of Mr. Farmington, of the Grindstone Works—fine man—president of the company. Yes, too, he knew Henry Gasby—probably the richest man in the county, and as crooked an old skate as ever skinned an orphans' home. Sure, yes, Stephen Holworth was a Glencoburn boy—square fighter—why, it was Holworth that drove the Reds out of town—yes, ma'am! And another Glencoburn boy was Joe Gasby—slick article

—like his dad. While Steve was fightin' the Reds, Joe was grabbin' up all the Oldham stock he could get at half price.

* * * * * *

Miss Oldham called on Peter Booth, the family's attorney through many years. They had subsequent conferences also, and Mary Oldham decided to attend the annual meeting of Oldham stockholders, and did so.

The gathering was a considerable one. In the plant and in and about the town there were many people who had a few shares of Oldham stock. Even in the aggregate, however, these could exert no more than a moral influence as between greater interests. Miss Oldham wore the somber color of mourning. It seemed to accentuate the firm lines about her mouth and eyes. She was accompanied by Mr. Booth. Though her presence had been expected by no one, she was warmly greeted on all sides. In her own self-possessed and slightly chilling manner she acknowledged the welcome accorded her.

There were the usual preliminaries, but there came an early trial of strength between the Gasby and the Ensign camps, as the newspapers styled the opposing factions. This developed in a motion made by a small stockholder accompanying Joseph Gasby, propos-

ing that, since the annual report had been printed and copies were available, the reading of it be dispensed with. The statement had been prepared largely by Joseph Gasby. The object of the motion was to bar open comment upon it by Fenton Thatcher who, as vice-president, presided, and was well primed to say a few things concerning the report which the Gasby following might not wish to hear. Winthrop Ensign requested a formal vote on the motion and it was taken.

Mr. Fenton appointed a representative of each faction as tellers and Winthrop Ensign and Joseph Gasby as judges. It was no surprise that the Ensign crowd was sadly defeated, for, though Miss Oldham's presence automatically cancelled the proxy she had given, she voted with the Gasby interests. Poor old Mr. Fobes had secretly hoped that her attendance meant a late change of view on her part, and was grievously disappointed.

Of the 90,000 shares of stock outstanding, it had been shown that 82,000 shares were represented in person or by proxy. The vote on the motion stood: For the motion, which is to say, the Gasby faction,—49,600 shares; against 32,400 shares.

Although defeated, Winthrop Ensign smiled, for the figures showed clearly that the gen-

eral run of shareholders was opposing Gasby control. Mr. Gasby also smiled and a casual spectator might easily have supposed their pleasure to be mutual.

For directors, seven names were placed in nomination—Miss Mary Oldham, Henry Gasby, Joseph Gasby, Winthrop Ensign, Edward Fobes, Fenton Thatcher and Stephen Holworth. As five were to be chosen, it was known that the Gasby faction intended the board to include Miss Oldham, Henry and Joseph Gasby, Mr. Thatcher and Edward Fobes. It was well known that the Gasbys were especially opposing Mr. Ensign and meant him to have an object lesson which, in turn, should have a salutary influence as against opposition to themselves which might develop in other quarters.

In fact, wholesome fear had already been inspired. At the last minute Edward Fobes confessed to Mr. Thatcher and Mr. Ensign that with a view to self-preservation, he thought he might better vote with Miss Oldham, which must mean, of course, the Gasbys. He pleaded his long service in the company and the danger that he might be ousted. On the ground of old friendship, the two men gave a reluctant consent that he cast his lot with the opposition.

There came a stir and buzz as ballots were distributed and presently collected. The tellers began the count. Suddenly a look of consternation swept over the face of Joseph Gasby. His face flushed red. At the same moment the veriest trace of a smile flitted across the impassive countenance of his associate judge, Winthrop Ensign. As the senior judge, the tellers handed Mr. Ensign their reckoning of the ballot, and with tranquil dignity he read:

For Miss Mary Oldham .....54,700 shares
For Henry Gasby .....27,300 shares
For Joseph Gasby .....27,300 shares
For Winthrop Ensign .....54,700 shares
For Edward Fobes .....54,700 shares
For Fenton Thatcher .....54,700 shares
For Stephen Holworth .....54,700 shares

Someone in the crowd gave a wild whoop. "Hurrah for Holworth!" As if it had been a signal, the astonished small stockholders joined in a lively round of applause which Mr. Thatcher sternly, if not immediately, quieted.

"Mr. President," said Peter Booth, at the earliest opportunity, "Miss Oldham requests me to say a few words in her behalf. They are that, since it is obvious that she has voted contrary to the way in which her stock would

have been voted had she been absent and had her proxy remained effective, it is her wish that the meeting and the stockholders in general know this to be her own free act and deed. She has been unduly influenced by no one. Her action is the result of her own examinations and her own conclusions, and she expressly wishes me to say that she does not care to discuss the matter, or to enter upon the subject with any one, at any time."

The Gasbys, father and son, looked blank. What they thought then or afterward, was known to themselves alone. At a later time Joe Gasby blamed his father for in some way "queering" himself with Miss Oldham. Mr. Gasby, senior, told Mr. Gasby, junior, that it was he himself who had estranged the Oldham interests. "In fact," he said, "you have altogether too much sour sap in your make-up. Stay in my office a year or two and learn something!"

Directors of the Oldham Company promptly made Stephen Holworth president and general manager. Other officers were re-elected. Poor Edward Fobes was nearly paralyzed by chagrin as he realized that he had supported the Gasbys against his friends and Miss Oldham. Winthrop Ensign enjoyed the situation hugely.

The result of the meeting took business circles and the newspapers likewise greatly by surprise; but they never learned why the Oldham interests deserted Gasby. As a matter of fact, neither Steve Holworth nor Winthrop Ensign could have told them then, or for a long time afterward. Nevertheless—HOLWORTH PRESIDENT OF OLDHAM CO. was a page-wide headline carried by the papers for many miles around.

In the town of Glencoburn there was much quiet enjoyment of the Gasby defeat—high satisfaction in the election of Steve Holworth. Bob Liscomb came upon the news as he picked up the morning paper at breakfast. He gave a yell, leaped to his feet and loudly called upon an invisible audience for three cheers. Such audience as there was, namely Mrs. Liscomb, emerged from the kitchen.

"What in the world are you doing?" she demanded.

Bob told the joyful news.

"Well, in that case you might ask him for a new set of tires for the Ford!" she observed tartly. "Seems to me we've been riding on three wheels and a rim about long enough. I've always liked Steve, though. And he's lucky. He wasn't especially bright as a boy, I remember."

Also, in the town of Glencoburn, Miss Elizabeth Aldervale made it a point to intercept Uncle Billy Fee as the aged gardener went about his work at the Aldervale home. At that moment he was carrying ashes from the basement. "Uncle Billy," she said, casually, "have you seen the paper? Have you seen that Steve Holworth has been made president of the Oldham Company?"

"Yes, that I have, Miss Elizabeth," he said, putting his basket down and looking up thoughtfully. "I read it all through. It was not such surprisin' news, an' I wouldn't go so far as to call it bad news."

"Uncle Billy," she said gently, "I am going to tell you a great secret. For nearly a year I have been Mrs. Stephen Holworth."

"Hu-um-h—married to Steve!" said the old man, slowly, hazily. He paused, weighing his words with more than ordinary care. "Well, that don't surprise me so much, either. I'm bound to say, he's none too good fer ye. But it makes me the more free to allow it—Stephen is—*middlin' smart!*"